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Lands of Summer

LANDS OF SUMMER

SKETCHES IN ITALY SICILY AND GREECE

BY T. R. SULLIVAN

"*To lands of summer across the sea.*"
TENNYSON. The Daisy.

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TO MY WIFE

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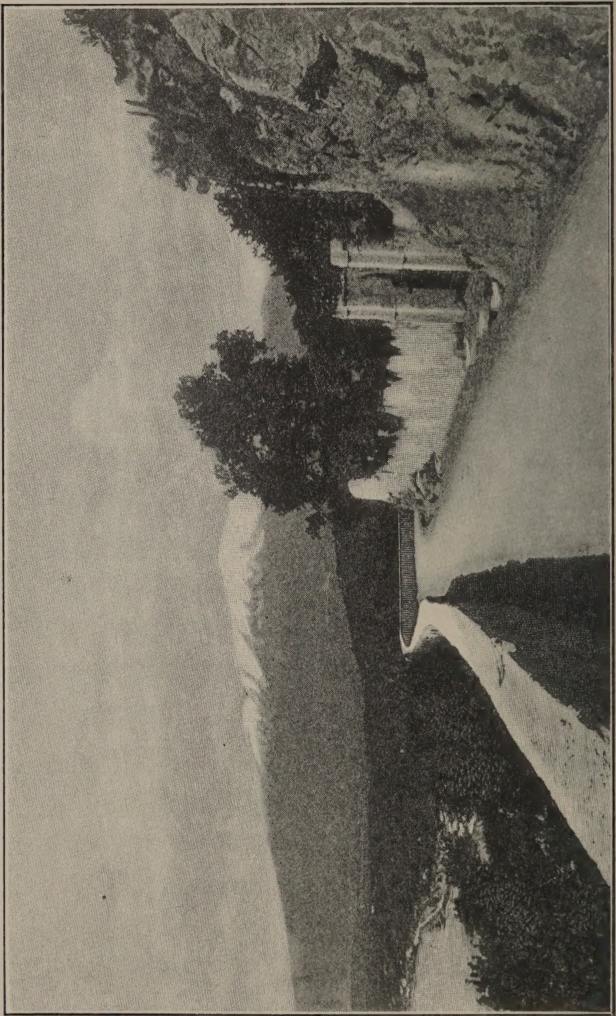
Spring-Time with Theocritus



Spring-Time with Theocritus

AFTER the long Paris winter, bleak, chilly, and dark, it seemed to us that we could not reach too quickly Sicilian sunshine, with its attendant

> "... aisles of pleasant shadow, greenly roofed
> By tufted leaves."

So, in the cramped, uncomfortable *train de luxe*, whose only real luxury was that of speed, we rushed in one day through the boot of Italy from straps to toe-cap, making of Rome but a railway-station, and at Naples, in the dead of night, getting the merest glimpse of Vesuvius in a fine frenzy of eruption. We woke the next morning to find ourselves cautiously skirting the foam-flecked sea, on the edge of the Calabrian landscape, awesome in its vast distances scarred and seamed by earthquake, all gullies and dry torrents, bordered with cactus-hedges, half uprooted by subterranean convulsion. We hailed their thorny disks as harbingers of the warm south; but alas! the wind rose, the sun obscured itself, the blue sea paled; and when, in the very teeth of Scylla and Charybdis, our grimy train crawled aboard a modern ferry-boat for its unmomentous passage of those mythic perils, Sicily opened out before us gray and cold. At three o'clock in the afternoon of our third day we alighted shivering in the central railway-station of Messina. Still shivering, we explored her squares and byways, shopped on the Marina and climbed her flowered hillsides, overlooking half the ancient world, while the sun played hide-and-seek with us. April had come, but in the shape of a poor changeling from the north, making cynical sport of the semi-tropic vegetation.

At Taormina, on the afternoon of our arrival, there was a raw sea-breeze, but the skies were clear; and the sun set magnificently behind the snow-fields of Etna as we climbed to the top of the ruined theatre for a first look at its famous prospect. The theatre, though restored by the Romans, is essentially Greek; the seats are gone, but the inclosing walls remain, including those of the stage for which this ruin is remarkable. Its pillared exits and entrances fill all the foreground. Beyond, yet far beneath, lies the town on a lower hillside, sloping south to the sea from its rocky citadel, backed by the fortified mountain-peak of Mola; and, above all, out of chestnut forests, dotted with small villages, soars Etna's cone of purest white, perpetually plumed with curling smoke. It is the Fuji of Sicily, always recurring in the landscape. All views of it are fine, but none finer than this, in which its desert wastes of lava are either invisible or softened by the distance. The outlook here, in its splendid architectural setting, is at once panoramic and intimate, with nothing, far or near, to dim the sense of perfect beauty. The first glance from the broken wall with its nodding wild-flowers supports the judgment of the old-time traveller that this, with the Peak of Teneriffe and the far-off gleam of Damascus, is to be classed among the three wonder-views of the world.

At the theatre-gate stands the inn, which has so loyal a following that the chance newcomer is often denied admission to it. Warned of this danger, we had telegraphed for rooms; but those assigned to our party of three were three small cells approached by an underground passage, so remote from one another that the jovial porter compared them to the three Sicilian cities, Messina, Catania, and Palermo. As he promised better things, however, later, we accepted our temporary lodging without a murmur. And in the following days so many less fortunate applicants were turned away that we grew thankful to be lodged at all. Though we lived apart, in semi-monastic seclusion, down many a winding stair, our windows opened upon the inn-garden, which faces Etna and the shore in a series of time-worn terraces overgrown with flowers. There were beds of iris bordered with box, bowers of ilex, mossy fountains, and broken columns festooned with roses. A haven of peace, rest, and warmth — when the sun shone. But the weather proved worse than capricious. Our season was that exceptional one common to all climates. The next ten days were gray, cold, showery, or days of prolonged rain. Etna went in, and stayed in. Even the lizards avoided the prevailing dankness of that lovely spot, and lurked in the walls, instead of basking where sunshine should have been. Once, for half a day, the curse was removed. The King and Queen of England made a progress through the flower-strewn streets of Taormina under chiming bells. They saw the town as we should have seen it. And when they toiled up the theatre-steps, the mountain graciously uncloaked itself before the lens of Alexandra's camera. Then the clouds came back; we settled down for another spell of weather; the oldest inhabiting invalids shook their heads and said that nothing like it had ever been known.

At last the wind changed, rewarding us for patient waiting. We had nights of glorious moonlight, days of brilliant sunshine, when we explored the country far and wide, in a succession of walks along vineyard paths and mule-trails, down through olive groves into deep ravines, open toward the sea; up from them to the ramparts of Mola and the wild mountain-passes beyond it, by precipitous cliffs, over half-ruined bridges with cascades foaming under them. The shepherds piped high on the hills as in the days of Daphnis and Menalcas, marshalling their scattered flocks. Sometimes the path ended suddenly in a tangled thicket; and once, crawling on through the underbrush, we emerged upon the open grain-fields of a villa-farm reclaimed from the wilderness. The house and all its rambling out-buildings were closed; we climbed the low wall, crossed the stable-yard to the arched doorway of the main entrance, with its rudely sculptured armorial bearings, its niche for an enshrined Madonna; and, in the shade of a trim pergola, looked across the garden, over gorge and mountain, to the blue Ionian waters, with the peaks of Calabria in the distance. All was in perfect order, the paths were raked and weeded, the iris-beds along the avenue were in full bloom. We walked down between them, meeting no sign of life, to an iron *grille* in the front wall of the estate. It was unlocked, and we passed out upon the bridle-path at the head of the valley, into the world again, leaving the place under the spell of its enchanting silence. None of the townspeople, whom we questioned, could give any clue to its ownership; none even could recognize it from our description. It remains for us unidentified upon its secluded height, a day-dream of that April afternoon.

Holy Week followed, with quaint, primitive ceremonials in which the whole town took part. On Good Friday an image of the Dead Christ was borne in the twilight the length of the Corso, attended by penitents from all the parishes carrying lighted tapers and emblems of the Passion, and marching thus in procession to solemn music. At noon, on Saturday, fire-crackers and explosives of all kinds were set off, *in trionfo*, to mark the end of Lent. On Easter Sunday a stage was built high up in one of the church façades for the performance of a miracle-play by six small angels; the Madonna and Christ, in wood, of heroic size, met on the terrace below; the angels crowned the Virgin amid a wild uproar of clanging bells and bursts of gunpowder; then Christ, Virgin, the angelic host, priests, acolytes and a brass band, paraded the streets from one parish to another. The peasants of the countryside rested from their labors for the festival, and descended upon the town in their gayest colors. All day long they tramped the Corso. Our last impression of Taormina was like the song of the Psalmist — the loud noise, the rejoicing with trumpets and sound of cornet; the hills were joyful together and pelted it with flowers.

The next morning we departed upon our long circuit of the island, making it in the wrong way, so-called, which is so much the more the right way for tranquil spirits. Obeying the guidebook, one should go from

Palermo to Girgenti and Siracusa, by the customary route. We, on the contrary, went from Siracusa to Girgenti and Palermo, in this reversal evading a pestiferous swarm of springtide tourists, almost alone on our side of the railway. And a very agreeable railway it is: the roadbeds are smooth, the tunnels short and infrequent; there is little smoke and less dust; the carriages are light, wide and airy, with excellent dining-cars attached at intervals. A certain deliberation in methods of procedure must be expected. But, this allowance made, there is no better train-service anywhere, and the absence of Anglo-Saxon hustle is refreshing. The train jogs along through towns and villages, between orange and lemon groves, often very near the sea, into which juts some towered promontory or pale green headland; now crossing a shallow river to follow the margin of a bay dotted with islands; then turning inland to brush over fields of wild-flowers — the amaryllis and the broom, the wild rose and its close counterpart, the cistus, the bright yellow spurge that grows in rifts of lava. The whole aspect is strange and animating to northern eyes, marvellous in its ever-varying color. At luncheon, one day on the road to Girgenti, we crossed a meadow that spread away to the snows of Etna in one solid mass of poppies, so vivid as to bid "the rash gazer wipe his eye" more than once. The food was admirable and admirably served; yet the coarsest fare would have done as well; we have forgotten it. But we do not forget that our eyes were fed then, as never before nor since. It was like the radiance of a cloud at sunset, unearthly, on the earth incomparable.

Slowly as the train proceeds, one would often be glad to delay it longer, especially in the heart of the island, where may be seen afar off large provincial towns, out of touch with travel, and walled mountain summits rising from shadowy depths, which were the grim retreats of brigands, by no means long ago. Of brigandage now one never hears, — or hardly ever,— for all statements concerning it are qualified most craftily. When sporadic instances occur, — and that they do occur is universally admitted, — the victims are always native Sicilians of reputed wealth. To be a foreigner is to pass unmolested. Nevertheless, when we had climbed, one afternoon, to the castle-fort on a lonely height above the town of Monreale in the outskirts of Palermo, we were told on our return that we had done an unwise thing. And we realized then, as we had not before, that the brace of gendarmes, whom we met strolling leisurely up the path as we came down, were probably walking that way on our account. The truth being, that while organized bands of outlaws under semi-heroic chieftains are now extinct, footpads and highwaymen still haunt the neighborhood of the larger cities for plunder on the spot, or even for capture and prolonged captivity in the hope of ransom. Undoubtedly, they strive to discriminate between the native and the foreigner; and for this the foreigner must be duly grateful, as well as for the fact that the wild uplands about Taormina, where he is most likely to put their discretion to a practical test, are entirely free from such marauders. The peasants abounding there are simple, independent souls of the friendliest description. Even the whining wayside beggar is exceptional. This is due to the English, who have established industrial schools, and labored otherwise with the happiest result to make the people self-respecting.

The famous monuments of Sicily, brought home, through photography, to all the world, have been described a hundred times. In civic art it is a lesser Italy, lacking the high achievement of the Renaissance, but glorified by rare treasures of the Byzantine period, like the Palatina Chapel at Palermo, and the churches of Monreale and Cefalù, which are second to none. The work of the Greek colonists, scattered far and wide, is of great beauty, absorbing in its interest. Girgenti, with its five ruined temples fronting the unsailed African Sea, has been epigrammatically declared more Greek than Greece, — a pious exaggeration. Their perfect form being one best expressed in marble, these columns and architraves were once overlaid with polished stucco to simulate it. What remains is of yellow sandstone; so that, seen from a distance, the temples look like those carefully designed cork models which used to be kept under glass in classical schools. The style is there, without the texture and the gleam. The comprehensive view of them on their green hilltops across the intervening valleys is justly renowned, yet it cannot truthfully be called Greek. As there is nothing like it anywhere, one may like it well, and let well alone.

The Sicilian cities show marked individuality in their characteristics. Messina, on its splendid harbor, the natural anchorage of the straits, is a quiet seaport with a declining trade; Catania a populous, commercial one. Siracusa has dwindled to a fortified naval station, half-encompassed by idle, melancholy, suburban wastes that formed part of the ancient city. They include the grim prison quarries, the catacombs, the Greek theatre and amphitheatre, the street of tombs, and other ruined traces of the colonists. Palermo, the capital, is a crowded, bustling, golden yellow city of three hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. It is superbly placed on a wide sea-frontage, between mountain-capes, at the foot of the Conca d'Oro, — a richly cultivated valley, spreading out like the hollow of a huge shell, as its name indicates, to other mountains far inland. All the great steamship lines converge at Palermo; its commercial importance steadily increases; yet it remains metropolitan, not cosmopolitan, — in touch with the world, but strangely out of it, adhering to antiquated, semi-barbarous manners and customs, some of which seem purely oriental. A woman, for instance, must not walk alone in the streets there, no matter what her social rank may be. Even a maid-servant refuses to go ten steps to post a letter unaccompanied by her duenna. Everywhere, Palermo's methods suggest a dull disinclination to advance, — the apathy of the East, without the charm; a remote insularity, where one feels caught in an eddy of the human current, — farther from the main channel than at Cairo.

With our month of Sicily drawing to a close, we returned to Messina by the railway of the northern coast, under lofty Cape Tindaro and castled Milazzo, always in full view of the sea, from which rise vaguely, far away, the Lipari Islands, where Æolus bagged the winds and gave them to Ulysses. Bound for Greece by the shortest route, we had engaged passage in the steamship Stura of the Florio line. Looking absurdly small and none too seaworthy, she lay at anchor in the quiet harbor, across which an unwieldy rowboat conveyed us, long after dark, to board the ship with some misgiving. It was an agreeable surprise to find the neat, comfortable quarters of the first cabin all at our disposal, since we were its only passengers. The chief steward, Italo, was a brisk young Sicilian; his assistant, Gaetano, elderly, dignified, well-trained, an ideal servant. Both, clearly, stood in awe of the stewardess, whose tall, sibylline figure dominated everything. She had superabundant, coal-black hair, flashing eyes, ruddy cheeks and a powerful voice, frequently uplifted in tones of command. All hands addressed her as "Madama." She wore an air of omniscience, singularly impressive. There was no gainsaying it. When she informed us that instead of merely touching at Catania, as on shore we had been led to believe was the custom, the ship would tie up there for twenty-four hours, we knew at once that she must be right. Later, we steamed down the straits, to wake early the next morning alongside the quay under the big stone mole, thirty feet high, and a quarter of a mile in length, which protects Catania's harbor.

It was the first of May, the feast of the laboring classes in continental Europe, and, upon going ashore, we found the town given over to a general holiday. Pasted here and there upon the walls were posters, socialistic in their sentiment; we met small bands of workingmen parading peacefully, but saw no demonstrations of an exciting character. Catania, the nearest city to Etna, has suffered much in past ages from eruption and earthquake shock. The rough lava-flow crops up in its streets, just as it congealed there long ago. It is not only built upon lava, but this most available material is also the chief element of its construction. Its dull, mercantile atmosphere had attracted us little, in our short visit, a fortnight before. But for some inscrutable reason Catania is the delight of most Sicilians, and even Italians speak of it in a kind of ecstasy. We added to our knowledge of its sights on this feast-day; then suddenly resolved to take a long drive out of it to Aci Castello, of which we had caught a fleeting impression in the earlier time from our railway carriage. We thought this the brightest of inspirations; but no excursion could have been more disappointing. We drove for six miles between walls too high to overlook, on a wretched lava-road, intolerably rough and dusty. Once there, we were in the land of song again; the land of Acis and Galatea, of trickling stream, sunny steep, and ruined stronghold, with the surf-beaten rocks of Polyphemus stranded as they fell from the giant's hand. Flowers grew everywhere; even the contorted shapes of lava at our feet were garlanded with them. We had them all to ourselves, and we understood why, perfectly. Nothing would have induced us to take that drive again. We dismissed our carriage on the spot, coming back in fifteen minutes by one of the infrequent trains which happily turned up at the proper time.

Our ship was ominously tranquil, with clear decks and hatches battened down. "Madama" met us with word of another twenty-four hours' delay, owing to the inopportune festa. "What! another day in Catania?" we groaned; "that can't be! We want idyls, not your lava-ridden city. We will not bear it; it is impossible!"

The sibyl shrugged her shoulders. "Nevertheless," she declared, "it is so."

So, of course, it was. The captain, whom we did not know even by sight, had gone ashore. We tried to make little of it, over an uncommonly good dinner, with Italo and Gaetano formally attending us in what we called our house-boat. We had Etna and the sea, the lights of Catania and moonlight afterward. Yet still we groaned.

Very early in the morning the sound of many voices, disputing sharply in Sicilian dialect, aroused us. We rang the bell to make indignant protest. "Madama" answered it, and we observed at once her unnatural pallor, her look of tragic mystery.

"What is the matter?" we asked.

"Oh, it is grave!" she whispered. "The crew refuses to work,—we have a strike, a mutiny! I tell you this in confidence; for Heaven's sake don't say I told you! But you will see; it is grave!" And she disappeared.

Here was pleasant news! We listened for confirmation, and heard, presently, a new voice, presumably the captain's, interrogating the men in choice Italian. One by one, in the cabin, just outside our door, they came before him. In every case, question and answer were alike. "Have you any complaint to make?"—"No."—"Yet you decline to work?"—"Yes."—"Go forward, then, to the forecastle!"

To this burden of accompaniment, many times repeated, we held a council of war, and, deciding that it was useless to remain on board the Stura, began to pack our effects. When this had been accomplished, all outside was still again. We summoned "Madama" and told her of our decision.

She went away, but almost immediately came back. "The captain desires to speak with you," she announced.

"Very well, show him in; we are here."

"But you will not betray me? Remember, from me you know nothing."

Reassured upon this point, she ushered in the captain, and waited, hovering behind him, with her finger on her lips. He was a native, handsome, jolly, alert, in age somewhat under fifty. "You go away? And why?" he asked.

"We have just heard your conversation with the sailors, and return to Messina to reclaim our passage-money. Since the Stura does not sail, why should we stay on board?"

"But the Stura will sail," he urged; "we are well accustomed to affairs like this, we Sicilians, — it is nothing, a mere question of adjustment to be settled in no time."

"What? You still hope to sail, then?"

"Certainly, in a few hours," he answered, laughing; "oh, go if you like, I do not stand in your way! But you are very comfortable here; my ship is all at your service. I advise you to remain and trust to me."

We looked down at the strapped trunks, beginning already to be sorry for our undue haste.

"Well, what do you say?"

"We say that you are the captain, and that we shall obey your orders." And so we unpacked again.

Our morning was spent upon the quays in a long stroll, during which we discovered that all the Italian vessels were tied up like our own. The general strike was the outcome of a dispute, prolonged through many months, between the labor unions and the Italian Navigation Company; resulting in a peremptory order to stop work on May 1st, issued from the union headquarters at Palermo. The ships of other nations were loading and discharging as if nothing had happened. From the top of the high mole we surveyed them all, heartily wishing ourselves committed to some other craft. Our own showed no sign of activity until early afternoon, when gendarmes, soldiers, and gold-laced officials of every description began to swarm upon the deck, — one, of manifest importance, being pointed out as Commander of the Port. We went in among them, to be met by our own commander, a spiritless shadow of himself. He informed us that all attempts at compromise had been in vain; his men would not listen to reason. "You had better go," he admitted mournfully; "I advise you to return to Messina."

That was all very well, but we were already too late for the afternoon train; moreover, the cabin leading to our quarters was now given over to a conference of dignitaries too august for interruption. To wait awhile, at least, seemed best. We accordingly withdrew to the hurricane-deck, and looked down upon the scene, into which soon entered a procession of carriages, approaching at a gallop down the quay. They drew up in line, alongside, to the number of fourteen, waiting long, while the police chatted with the militia; while " Ee-ta-lo," summoned repeatedly by hawk-like shrieks from " Madama," flew back and forth, chiefly on purposes of refreshment, as appeared from the number of bottles that he bore into the cabin, where the higher officials still sat in secret conclave.

At last the assembly dissolved, and the gendarmes were sent forward to the forecastle, whence, presently, they returned, bringing with them, as prisoners, the entire crew of twenty-eight, who were lined up on the main deck. The Commander of the Port produced a copy of the legal code, from which he read them the particular article that applied to their transgression, involving the penalty of a year's imprisonment. Then he questioned each of the hands, always in the same terms. "Do you persist in your refusal to work?" The answer was always "Yes;" and when all had so replied, they were promptly handcuffed together, two and two, conducted on shore to the carriages, and driven off, each couple with a gendarme in attendance. Many of them were young, mere boys in fact; these took the matter lightly, laughing, with a cheery farewell to the officers and to the captain, who stood apart, a sad spectator of these proceedings. Some of the older men looked grave; one grumbled, because he wore slippers, and was not permitted to go forward for his shoes; but none made the least show of resistance. All went willingly, gratified and encouraged by the demonstrations of a miscellaneous crowd, gathered upon the pier to give each prisoner, as he was carried away, the heartiest good wishes.

This process of deportation was a slow one, and before it was entirely over, our dinner was announced. We dined by ourselves, with our minds turning toward the midnight train. But while we lingered over coffee, the captain, whose spirits rose and fell like a New England thermometer, joined us in a very cheerful mood. All, now, was going well; he would ship a new crew in the morning; at night, he hoped to sail. "So you had better stick to the ship!" he concluded. That course was certainly the easiest, if not the wisest, and veering like weathercocks, we accepted it again.

Soon after daybreak work began, but only work of unloading. "Madama" took malignant delight in assuring us that we could not possibly get off that day. This time we doubted her, quoting the captain to prove the contrary; but she laughed scornfully, insisting all the more. And again she was right. For when the great man sat down with us at breakfast, he jauntily remarked that to-morrow the loading would begin. Raging inwardly, we wandered off to the town, which, now, we hated. But it was our only time-killing resource. We dragged ourselves to the principal park, the Villa Bellini, and loitered there for hours, embowered in roses. Yet, in spite of them, the place had an air of neglect that was far from exhilarating. When, late in the afternoon, we returned to the ship, the discharging was at an end. Boxes of oranges and lemons were actually sliding into the hold. After dinner the captain joined us upon the quarter-deck, stirring our tardy sympathies with detached fragments of his history. He had been in a hospital, seriously ill, for months, to be met on his return to duty by this catastrophe. The crew of the adjacent ship, the Solferino, had given in. Could his own men have foreseen that, instead of obeying blindly the orders from Palermo, they, too, might have yielded. Now, they would all be sent to prison, undoubtedly. He made no further promises of speedy departure, but even hinted that, as his new crew was not entirely complete, we must expect more cabin conferences to-morrow. We sank to sleep in desperation.

Throughout the following day our dock under the great stone mole was a roaring tumult of men, horses, and laden carts, coming, going, or tangled together, without system, without leadership. All the men yelled at once, all the time, whether heeded or not. Conferences were resumed in the cabin, while the cargo somehow shunted itself into the hold. The captain, later, told us that his crew was engaged; but even then he gave no hope of sailing. At five in the afternoon the turmoil was at its height. On the narrow quay, at that hour, we counted fifty carts piled high with oranges, lemons, and bags of sulphur. We dined at half-past six, while the deafening racket still went wildly on. Just at sunset, however, the captain suddenly gave orders that no more freight would be received. Thereupon, the yells redoubled in force. Scores of disappointed teamsters stormed and swore, threatening all on board with torments of the damned, if we left them in the lurch. But in spite of that, the hatchways were closed, the planks withdrawn. We were really to sail at last, as even "Madama" agreed. But sailing was a long, slow affair, badly bungled. The hands proved painfully new at it. The captain danced about, now ordering, now appealing. "Let me breathe the pure air of the open sea!" he implored; while one of his officers whispered to us that the crew was composed of cobblers and concierges who had never been on the sea, open or shut, in their lives.

Through all this waste of time, the exasperated mob on shore never stopped cursing for a single instant. Between eight and nine o'clock, in full, clear moonlight, we drifted slowly away, leaving it astern, still cursing. In a few moments we rounded the flashing lighthouse at the end of the mole, and put the Sicilian inferno out of sight and hearing. The detested city of Catania, with all its lighted windows and Etna glistening behind it in silvery lines, looked like some master-painter's dream of paradise. And before us, in grateful silence, lay the smooth, dark sea.

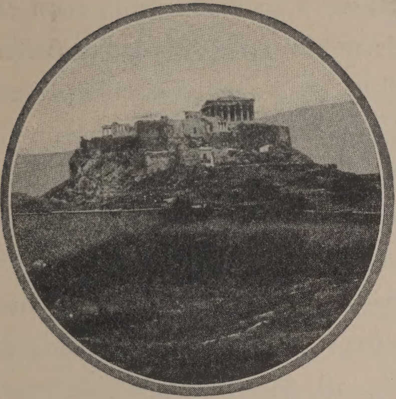
We woke far out on the blue waters of the Mare Ionio, which behaved wonderfully well, considering its evil reputation as the worst spot in the whole Mediterranean for discomfort. Our rate of speed was plainly very low; so, too, was the rate of discipline. The sailors shuffled about like tramps; the trimness and tidiness so conspicuous in an ocean voyage were wholly wanting, — nothing was ship-shape. But the barometer stood at "set fair;" and as we steamed slowly along, birds of brilliant plumage, from the land just under the horizon-line, surrounded us.

> "The crested lark
> Sang with the goldfinch; turtles made their moan,"

and all the song-birds of Theocritus fluttered through the rigging, or perched upon the spars. The officers armed themselves with shot-guns, and, dashing madly fore and aft, brought down their game indiscriminately, whether it could be bagged or not. The abandoned wounded splashed alongside and drifted struggling in our wake. To the atrocious sport we alone objected. "Madama" chuckled at it; Italo was in the seventh heaven; the captain himself, taking the lead, gloried in its reckless achievements. Before long, life on deck became impossible. A turtle-dove, pruning himself upon the cross-trees, was a shining mark. He tried to fly, wavered, then dropped into our group, spattering us with blood. We went below, and listened to the triumphant shouts of the sportsmen over each new victim. The captain came in for dinner, rubbing his hands with glee. "Turtle-doves are good eating," he said. But they all went to the officers' table; none were served to us.

Æolus had bagged the winds again. The next day, on a sea like a mill-pond, we drew near the mountains of the lower Peloponnesus and the island of Cerigo, passing them at night. All day our attendant land-birds flocked to the slaughter, which increased in fury. On the next they came no more; the decks reassumed their normal air of quiet disorder. We touched at Canea, the capital of Crete, and, leaving Cape Spada behind, steered for the calm Ægean. In the gray dawn the adventurous life upon our house-boat came to an end. It had presented an amusing side of which we were not unmindful. We had been treated as strange guests, with the courtesy of the port and of the sea. Yet we landed at the Piræus like prisoners newly released, rejoicing to be free of the Stura and all her tattered crew.

From Athens
to Corfu



From Athens to Corfu

I

Before journeying for the first time into a strange land, one naturally seeks the advice of more experienced travellers, especially if that be unencumbered by any obligation to follow it. In girding ourselves for Greece, therefore, we took counsel, not of one but of many; and the many minds we met left us in a state of more than common bewilderment. All roads led to Athens, but, out of it, opinions concerning them conflicted hopelessly. Spots on the one hand so difficult of access as really to be not worth while, on the other were of great importance and the easiest to reach. Improved itineraries cropped up continually, overshadowing the old familiar ones. And, strangely enough, all the irreconcilable statements were true, or had been true at the moment of experience. The fact being that the land changes hourly with new railways and steamship lines, new excavations and new hotels to match, so that the Greece of five years ago is not modern Greece at all.

On two points, however, opinions were practically unanimous. Unable, as we were, to speak a word of modern Greek, we should find ourselves helpless ten steps away from Athens; no other language would be of any use; we must consequently employ a dragoman. And we must prepare ourselves for dust of a peculiarly fine, penetrating sort, which everywhere would annoy us. So insistent were all upon this latter point, that "It never rains in Athens" became our byword long before arrival there. We did not, of course, quote the newly invented proverb literally, applying it to all the calendar months. But May was the particular month chosen for our visit; and we felt sure of continuous fine weather then. This assurance the guidebook confirmed by its meteorological record under the head of "Climate;" according to which, even so much as a drop of dew was unheard of from May to September, and but fourteen thunder-storms occurred annually at Athens,—presumably, not all in spring.

It was somewhat disconcerting to land at the Piræus on a May morning under leaden skies which, in another country, would have threatened rain. Convinced, here, that the threat was idle, we took an open carriage, and started cheerfully upon the hour's drive up from the port to town. But we had not gone far when the first drop fell. A moment later came the deluge. We packed away our dust-protectors and put up the carriage-top, cutting ourselves off from all the prospect. But this was rather a relief than otherwise. For to eyes fresh from Sicilian fields, the landscape seemed the abomination of desolation. Even the sea looked colorless and cold. Phaleron, the fashionable watering-place, stretched along the shore its barricade of ugly buildings; while the plain beyond it, across which we sped in the rain, opened up an expanse of desert land, unkempt, neglected. We had been warned that we should find it bare and treeless. But no warning could have foreshadowed its sterility. Even the Libyan desert has color in it, as well as variety of surface. Here all was uniformly level, bleak, deadly, dull beyond words.

We drove out of it through tame, unpeopled streets to the centre of all things, the

Constitution Square, plunging suddenly into life and movement; color, too, — for, besides the citizens, there were trees and flowering shrubs, bronze groups and splashing fountains. We stopped before the door of the principal hotel, magnificently vast; magnificently extortionate, too, as we soon discovered. All its prices had been doubled for the Olympic Games, and though the games were done, the preposterous charges held their own; nor could any effort of ours reduce them by a single drachma. But it was not long before we found better quarters for half the money at a less pretentious hotel, a few steps off. There, of course, we established ourselves, and there we remained during all our stay in Athens, well cared for, by men-servants chiefly. There was one exception, a benignant, elderly woman, who came to the front at critical moments so readily, that we christened her "Old Mother Comfort."

The rain stopped at noon, the sky cleared, and the sun shone out upon the city, which, turning from drab to white, looked suddenly like the ephemeral fabric of an exposition, all lightness and gayety. Unfamiliar costumes brightened the streets, where the pavements lay hidden under a yellow coating of slimy mud, into which the fine dust we had been taught to dread transforms itself at the slightest provocation. The dust, as dust, we never saw at all, either then or afterwards, anywhere in Greece; probably because, as usual, the season was exceptional. On the contrary, every step we took bemired us more and more; and our first walk explained why the boot-black class thrives as it does in the streets of Athens. They are not the ramshackle boot-blacks familiar to us in other lands, but an organized band of well-dressed, intelligent boys, carrying very neat, brass-trimmed boxes, on which a peculiar knock with the back of the brush serves to solicit custom; and this does not fail them, for the Athenian, whether dusty or muddy, must have his boots blacked many times a day. The boys swarm, in consequence, about the cafés, which are thronged at all hours of the day and night.

We made our way through the crowd, across the square, taking a short cut to the Acropolis, and in a retired corner came unexpectedly upon the beautiful little monument of Lysicrates, looking just as it does in the books. Then by narrow byways issuing upon a wide, outer boulevard, where no one walked but ourselves, we brought up at the ruined theatre of Dionysos; and finding the marble seats already dry, we basked upon them, like lizards in the sunshine, long enough to fix an impression of the place. As we surveyed its exquisite proportions and the fine sculptures of the stage, some of which stand almost uninjured, our drooping spirits rose a little. Here was the fabled charm of things beginning to unfold itself. Perhaps if we steeped our minds in this, we could absorb a little of it, and the rest would seem less awful. Yet there was something else. We had detailed instructions from an adept of the best period, which must be followed to the letter. We pulled them out, and reviewed them carefully. We were to go on up the road blindly, with downcast eyes, never pausing until we reached a certain spot upon the hillside just above the so-called Prison of Socrates. There we were to stop, to turn and look back upon what would startle and subdue us, — the Parthenon, at the point of all others from which it must be seen for the first time.

Overhead, at least, it was a wonderful afternoon, the best imaginable for the pious pilgrimage so thoughtfully devised for us. We obeyed orders, therefore, with the utmost caution, seeing little but the puddles under foot and the scanty grass through which we climbed the hill, until we reached our resting-place. Then our eyes were opened. We saw the great plain stretching off to the slopes of Mount Hymettos, the blue Ægean, the island of Ægina. At our feet was the cloven rock of the Areopagus; and just beyond it in the foreground rose the Acropolis with its cumulative wealth of marbles, some white, some golden yellow; with the pillared gates, the giant staircase, the splendid portico of the Erechtheum outlined against the sky; and, crowning all, the masterpiece of Phidias, a shattered ruin, wantonly wrecked and plundered, yet still, in its impoverished state, the temple of temples, alone, unrivalled, supreme in perfect beauty. We stood awakened unawares "to the glory that was Greece." The spell had been wrought upon the instant. This was the land of gods and heroes, after all.

Thenceforward, naturally, the Acropolis became the first thought of all our days. Whether we wandered over its ruined acres, mentally reconstructing entablatures, or, in the slang of archæologists, getting on to the curves of entasis and proving the levelheadedness of isokephalism; whether we studied the treasured fragments in its small museum, — the only modern building of the classic citadel, so artfully concealed as to be no disturbance; whether we looked up at it from the plain, or down at it from hill and mountain-slope, it was always the dominating feature in our minds as in the prospect. We carried it away with us everywhere in Greece, we brought it home to the "Golden North Americas." The impression once made, like that of the Pyramids or of Giotto's Tower, holds unshaken, defying change of place and lapse of time.

That dominant note, struck so long ago by the architects of the Parthenon, prevails to this day throughout the modern city, where, in all public buildings, the classic style, with marble colonnades and highly colored decorative friezes, has been applied to present needs creditably, if not always triumphantly. The University and the National Museum, dignified, impressive, are admirable in their restraint. The more ambitious façades of the Academy and the Library force inevitable comparison with the immortal work of the past,—too exacting a test; yet that the creative ambition was a fine one must be instantly admitted. All are well placed, gaining their full effect by ample approaches through ornamental grounds. There is a street of private houses, built of marble wrought into the same classic forms, each standing apart in its own garden, enviably open to the light and air. Nothing anywhere is hemmed in, and every new piece of construction seems the part of a preconsidered general scheme. Uniformity of line, variety of detail! The old formula, so well worked out, gives Athens a distinction peculiarly its own, to which the white marble, freely used, contributes much by its lightness and delicacy. It is a city of pleasant distances and cheerful breathing-places, not too large for comfort; shops, cafés, restaurants, alike are excellent; with cabs and tramways it is fairly well provided; but it sadly needs a corps of crossing-sweepers under an efficient street commission. The metropolitan pavements, the suburban roadbeds, are all abominable.

Our days went on under clouded skies, from which frequent showers descended upon us, usually accompanied by thunder and lightning. We began by counting the thunder-storms; but when half the fourteen allotted to Athens in any one season had occurred in a single week, we lost the reckoning. Our wise saw, "It never rains in Athens," came laughably untrue, and to replace it we invented another which stayed by us to the end, — "In Greece expect the unexpected!" This phrase should be ever on the lips of the intelligent traveller, and we bound up the wounds of many a disappointment by repeating it a dozen times a day.

Our cunning adept had charged us on no account to neglect one short excursion, not dwelt upon in the books, — that to the ancient monastery of Kaesarianí on the slope of Hymettos. So, one bright afternoon, when the daily cloudburst was over, we chartered a victoria and set forth among the ruts of the plain, wrenching our wheels at every turn. We crossed a muddy crevice in the ground, where pigs were wallowing, which, as we were shocked to learn, was the historic Ilissos; and we went wearily onward into dismal barrenness. There, the only sign of life was a group of horsemen afar off, wheeling and careering, as if in military manœuvres. But a little in advance of us we saw a red flag fluttering upon a staff. On our remote left came a puff of smoke, followed by a sharp report; on the remote right stood a white disk that looked uncommonly like a target; and our road lay directly between them. A trooper galloped toward us frantically, warning us to turn back; another rod, and we should be in peril of our lives! We put about with no unnecessary delay; the excursion at that moment was impossible. But our conveyance was hired for the afternoon, and we left the employment of it to our driver's discretion, which was exercised swiftly and decisively. Since we could not explore Hymettos, we should try Pentelikon; our objective point on one of its lower spurs being, according to him, a truly wonderful place, the famous spring of Marousi.

Of course, we had never heard of it. But as we bowled along the straight highroad up the open valley, we felt that our confidence was justified. The drive, though long, as all Greek drives are, was new and strange throughout; toward the end of it the valley narrowed, and we came up from sunny grain-fields to wooded slopes between stern mountain-ridges; the ancient quarries of Pentelic marble gleamed before us; we passed by the walled gardens and trim villas of an Athenian summer resort into quaint village streets, beyond which in an open space, or *platìa*, planted with pine trees, the spring, bubbling from its stone reservoir, filled a deep, oblong basin to the brim with clearest water. Ducks were splashing in it, and as we sat down upon its border, they paddled toward us, clamoring for food. We ordered this for them and for ourselves at a neighboring café; then, sitting there a long time, we watched the peasants who came in groups to fill their water-kegs. The women did the work, bearing off the heavy weights on bowed shoulders, while the men lounged and criticised. All wore the native costume, against which a progressive rising generation has set its face; it will soon be a thing of the past. That survival, existing, apparently, for our especial benefit, brightened all the twilight as we drove back to town. Marousi was done and well done, even though our monastery had been cut off from us at the cannon's mouth.

Upon inquiry, we were informed that the artillery manœuvres of which we had caught a glimpse would soon be over. But when, on a later afternoon, we started for Kaesarianí once more, the same dead line was drawn for us. Again we faced the field, the target, and the cannon-ball. This time we halted, with a demand to be told officially when the plain would be free from their infernal practice. The answer was that it would go on daily for at least a month,—but only in the afternoon. If we desired to climb Hymettos, the road was open to us in the morning hours. Early the next day, therefore, we entered upon the familiar expedition for the third time; at last, successfully.

The impossible road grew worse and worse, until, as we toiled up the barren mountain, it seemed little better than the bed of a dry torrent. The denuded solitude around us was dispiriting. Suddenly, at a turn of the rough watercourse, all changed. We entered a gorge wondrous in fertility, overgrown with cypress, fig, and olive; with rustling poplars and beeches of prehistoric grandeur. In the midst of this grove stood the monastery, an irregular mass of roofs, towers, and cloisters, built in the eleventh century over a pagan temple. Flowers of all hues gleamed in the grass; there was running water everywhere; it trickled down the mountain, it gushed out from a spring under an arch of the monastery wall, still ornamented with a marble ram's-head of the earlier shrine. The buildings looked dismantled and uninhabited.

We walked on up the gorge to a small, empty chapel with a lamp burning before the altar; and back through silence, broken only by the bird-songs, the murmur of bees, and the rippling water. Then we heard voices, and saw three peasants driving a sympathetic, inquisitive goat toward us along the grass-grown path. They stopped at sight of us, with kindly intent making it clear that we could enter the monastery, if we wished to do so. They shouted and beat upon one of the barred doors, which, at last, was opened by a grave young monk, who admitted us to a cloistered court, neatly kept, with well-ordered flower-beds. A clear stream ran down the centre over a bed of polished marble; Ionic columns stood about; fragments of early sculpture were built into the walls, making it hard to determine where temple ended and cloister began. At the back was a dark chapel with its altar and swinging lamps, its candles and icons. The monk did the honors of this quiet sanctuary, which has known no change but the slow one of disintegration for many centuries. As its doors closed behind us, the bright morning came abruptly to an end. We drove back in a fierce mountain storm, which whirled before us into Athens, where the streets were already deep in mud again. It cleared away, of course, in time for the manœuvres; but these we had finally outmanœuvred, in a propitious hour.

II

Meanwhile, our preparations for a tour of Phokis and Argolis had been slowly going forward, overswayed always by the dreadful spectre of the dragoman, whom we were taught to consider an essential nuisance. But daily the thought of subjection to him grew more uncomfortable; we had learned a few polite phrases of modern Greek, which gave us confidence far in excess of our knowledge, resulting in an audacious resolve to disregard advice and make the journey by ourselves. We bought tickets in advance, of the principal Athenian agent, who spurred us on with a document of instructions covering every step of the way. Armed with this, we left our heavy luggage behind, and one gloomy, wet morning, in light marching order, bade farewell for a time to the hotel staff. These good folk evidently thought the undertaking a rash one. The chamberman shook his head in doubt, and "Old Mother Comfort" stared at us with pained surprise.

The first stage was short, by electric railway to the Piræus, where we were to embark upon a steamer for the Gulf of Corinth. But at the terminal station a rude shock awaited us: the commissionaire, upon whom we depended for guidance to the landing, could not be found. Instead, there confronted us a small army of porters, all speaking at once, for the most part unintelligibly. We gleaned at last one incredible fact, — that no steamer would sail that day. Producing our tickets, we protested and insisted; until one of the band, perceiving that we were not to be convinced, shouldered our luggage in desperation, and led us through rain and mud to the steamship office. There his statement was speedily confirmed. Our steamer, laid up for repairs, could not be put in commission for nearly a week. One of its scheduled sailing-days had been quietly ignored, and we had chanced upon it. No course was open to us but an ignominious return to Athens.

The unexpected! We cheered each other with our proverbial gibe about it, as we journeyed back under the light luggage which seemed, now, of double weight. Then we noticed that all the house-fronts were hung with flower-garlands. Why? we asked; and were told that the fourteenth of May, masquerading as the first, in Greece, under the Julian Calendar, was a national holiday. Our own May-Day of a fortnight earlier had proved a most unlucky one to us in Sicily; a day of labor-union decrees and strikes, upsetting plans, retarding progress. Had we but known the date, we might well have foreseen a repetition of that disaster. But then it would not have been Greece, for the expected would have happened.

We had not exhausted the resources of Athens, where our enforced delay soon ceased to be vexatious. The days passed swiftly, with no more rain than usual. In due course, we set out again, this time on a perfect morning. Our steamer was an excursion-boat, pressed into freight service, cranky and overcrowded. We sailed an hour late, but, once out of the harbor, all discomfort sank into insignificance before the beauties of the Saronic Gulf, up which we steamed between the islands of Salamis and Ægina. The mountains skirted it on either hand in wild, lofty ranges; the blue waves danced their gentlest measure. Our fellow-passengers, chiefly native, were of all classes, interesting to watch and study. Thus we proceeded, in the early afternoon passing through the straight cut across the isthmus which forms the Corinthian canal; so narrow that the steamer almost grazed its yellow banks; so deep that our only view was of the sky-strip overhead and the airy net-work of the railroad-bridge midway, on which, far above us, a train rushed by. There are but four miles of this strange channel, and in a few minutes we issued from it to look back at Corinth under its high mountain-citadel. Before us opened wide the waters of the Corinthian Gulf, inclosed by rocky peaks, with the snow-capped summits of Helicon and Parnassos on our right, towering over all. Their foothills spring directly from the gulf; and, gradually nearing these steep, brown cliffs of the northern shore, we steered for a narrow bay, at the end of which stands the small town of Itea, the landing-place for Delphi, whither we were bound.

As the afternoon waned, clouds gathered about the mountain-tops, the breeze freshened, the waves began to dance more vigorously, even insolently to toss their heads. Our merry company of chattering Greeks grew heavy-hearted, lapsing, with closed eyes, into pallid silence. Little by little, the crowd melted away, mysteriously segregated in stuffy, inadequate retreats of the underworld; until at the bay's mouth, where the voyage became most exciting, close under

Parnassos, few were left above board to enjoy it. Drawn on into quiet water, we slowly reassembled in somewhat chastened form. Just before sunset the landing was effected by means of small boats. On the pier a carriage waited for us; and we entered at once upon our long drive through the valley, up the Parnassian spur to the point where, two thousand feet above the gulf, the French, a few years ago, laid all that could be found of ancient Delphi open to the world.

The sun went down as we wound slowly up from the olive groves, vineyards, and wheat-fields of the fertile plain. Across it passed a long train of pack-laden camels,—the only ones now left in Greece, last survivors of the Turkish rule. In the twilight we came to the ancient village of Chrysó, a large settlement straggling along the mountainside. The day's work was done; the villagers, at sound of our approach, flocked in the streets to inspect us curiously, always with the pleasant salutation, "*Kalí spéra,*" — Good-evening! — spoken in a gentle voice. In a few moments we looked down upon their roofs and belfries. The distant summits still gleamed in rosy light; but already the lamps of Itea twinkled against the dark water of the bay. Night, deepening there, stole up around us; overhead faint stars brightened, multiplied; and we climbed on for another hour and more in the darkness; coming then to Kastri, the new village substituted by the excavators of Delphi for one built upon its very site, which they were forced to destroy. It stands under a rocky ridge, round which, just beyond the village, the road made a sharp turn, opening up a new prospect of sky and stars. And there, at the turning-point, we stopped before the door of our hotel, the Pythian Apollo.

On the following day — a perfect one of spring — we saw Delphi at its best, an experience never to be forgotten, yet impossible to describe. How could one reproduce in words, or adequately through any medium, the vast, intersecting valleys, the green meadows, the gentle hillsides, the winding river? Parnassos, and its rough ravines; the wide outlook over the Corinthian Gulf; the mountain-barrier, encircling and defending all? It is landscape on a grand scale, defying comparison in color, light, and form, before which one stands at gaze, astounded, silent. Nature's combination here is of a special wonder, outstripping the possibility of expression.

When one descends from the heights, turning from broad effects of nature to contemplate man's fragmentary work, all preconceived notions are at once overthrown. As elsewhere in Greece, except at Athens, so little remains *in situ* above ground, that discovery seems to comprise only traces of ruin, rather than ruin itself. The pavement of a sacred way, the line of some foundation wall, a fallen shaft or broken capital overgrown with weeds, — these, and not much else to stimulate imagination, bring, at first, mere bewilderment to the lay explorer. By degrees, one learns to accept this, and in time, through study, one acquires a sense of the archæologist's joy at finding anything saved from the destructive forces of earthquake and warring nations. The most important fragments stand apart in the local museum, which is always a delight, — at Delphi, a rare one. But there, the first absorbing thought is of the Delphic oracle, which makes no responsive sign. The chasm of prophetic vapor is obliterated; the temple is thrown down, and all details of its arrangement are indeterminate. Within what must have been its limits, one confronts irritating disappointment. The neighboring theatre is in better case, for, though the stage is gone, the seats remain almost undisturbed, surrounded by grain-fields which encroach upon them here and there. From the upper tier, where a band of friendly reapers was at work, we overlooked the sacred precincts and all the splendid solitude.

Behind us opened the gorge of the Castalian Fountain, a dark, uncanny rift in the mountainside. At its mouth is the ancient rock-hewn basin into which the spring still flows under rude recesses in the cliff that once held votive offerings. Just across the road is a line of old plane trees, — offshoots, it may be, of those recorded in the earliest chronicles. Sitting in their shade, we watched the village life of which the spring's outlet seemed to be the common centre. As the memorable day drew to a close, the activities of the place redoubled. Peasants came and went, driving laden donkeys, or great herds of goats in solid phalanx, — there are more goats than human beings in Greece, as we are told, and we can well believe it; the gleaners toiled homeward on foot under the burden of their sheaves. The shadows lengthened in the valley, the sun set, and we lingered on, getting there of Delphi our last and best remembrance. Before daybreak we were off, driving down toward Itea in the dark, to be overtaken, half-way, by broad sunshine. At the port we rejoined our ship, and steamed immediately away, along the Gulf of Corinth.

Three miles from the modern town lies old Corinth, for centuries marked only by seven monolithic columns of a temple to Apollo, standing upon a bleak hillside. Ten years ago the American School took possession there, and has now excavated a large portion of the ancient city. Streets, colonnades, and temples may be traced by their substructures, leading up to the fountain, Peirene, renowned for ages throughout Greece; and of its sacred environment much more is left. Here are courts, walls, basins, dating from Greek, Roman, and Byzantine periods, a priest's sanctuary and good sculptured detail, entirely comprehensible to the wayfaring mind. The long climb up the height to Acro-Corinth, through a wilderness of mediæval fortification, is a glorious adventure, promoted in our case by a bright boy and girl, who served not only as guides, but also as painstaking instructors in the niceties of modern Greek. The remnants of the Acropolis upon the summit are scanty; but the panoramic view of the two gulfs, divided by their sandy isthmus, of shore and plain and mountain heaped on mountain, displays these natural wonders with a prodigality that nowhere else seems possible. Here is the heart of Greece; the pilgrim's goal since time was, and men stood here to reckon it.

The next morning we went on by rail over the mountain-pass, down into the plain of Argolis, — a picturesque journey of two hours. At the little way-station of Mykenæ our carriage stood ready, and we drove in it diagonally across the plain to that "innermost corner of Argos" chosen by the Atridæ for their stronghold. At the entrance of a narrow defile, where two ravines open into gloomy mountain solitudes, is the triangle of lofty table-land crowned by their citadel, which must have seemed to them impregnable. Yet more than thirty centuries ago it lay conquered and despoiled, — a stone-heap at the beginning of authentic history, through all the later ages neglected, forgotten; until, in our own day, Schliemann unearthed its golden treasure, traditional with Homer. The Cyclopean walls, the royal tombs, the dim sepulchral monument known as the Treasury of Atreus, the sombre lion-gate, set in the dreary splendor of the mountain-fastness, impress the mind profoundly. Our uncouth shepherd-guide, incomprehensible in speech, seemed leading us beyond the world of men to some unearthly limbo of which he was the grim, mysterious keeper. The shades of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra lurked in the wind-swept palace chambers. They live to stir the memory, and all else at lonely Mykenæ is lost to recognition.

We lunched under the gate of lions, a stone's throw from the rifled graves, which, at last, have yielded up their gems and diadems, their masks and swords, their buried beakers. But who made, who wore them? What kingly line was this of all the thousand generations, whose deeds have no existence, whose very names went unrecorded? These are secrets the grave will not give up, fast bound, to all eternity, in elemental silence.

Lonely Mykenæ! Its inscrutable desolation haunted us all the afternoon, as we drove for nine miles over the Argive plain between the mountains to Nauplia and the sea. Our way led through Argos, where we halted for its ancient theatre, hewn from solid rock. On a stone threshing-floor near by it, four white horses tramped abreast, treading out the grain. Beyond the modern town we turned into fertile country steeped in sunshine, and, crossing the plain to its eastern border, stopped at Mykenæ's sister-city, Tiryns, the "wall-girt." Here are prehistoric fragments on a Titanic scale,—courts, chambers, altars, and stone galleries of marvellous constructive skill; but from their open site, hardly more than thirty feet above the flowering meadows, they lack the awful solemnity of Mykenæ. With Argos in sight and Nauplia at its very gate, Tiryns has lost the effect of loneliness; the ghosts must have given out in desperation long ago.

As the sun was setting, we came into Nauplia, a bright, airy city built under fortified heights at the head of a gulf, round which the mountains meet the sea. Wide quays open on the port and land-locked harbor, where a steamer lay at anchor. We made a circuit of the promenade to watch the sun go down across the water, behind Argos and its citadel. Northward, we looked the plain's whole length, as far as distant Mykenæ, over which a storm-cloud gathered. In the deepening twilight the cloud grew denser, cutting it off from view. And darkness stirred in us a chill suggestion of the ruined palace under that impenetrable gloom.

The drive of more than three hours from Nauplia to Epidauros is called in the books a dull one. Our road, it is true, wound through a sparsely settled valley between rocky, unfruitful mountain-pastures. Yet there was exhilaration in the air; the views were strange, unspoiled, entirely Greek; so that the long morning was soon gone. Half-way, we stopped at a farmhouse to water our horses. The dogs were driving a flock of sheep out of the fold; the farmer and his two small children turned from their tasks to greet us, so agreeably that we plunged at once into conversation with every broken phrase at our command. The man was called "Athanasios;" the boy, "Mercurios;" the girl, "Selene;" fine names, these, for that rude dwelling. At parting they showered upon us many a good wish. We drove on across a rushing river, around the base of a high hill, where perches the populous village of Ligourió. The valley narrowed, and widened again into a level plain, all strewn with ruins. Column and capital sprouted there, as if the armed men sprung from the dragon's teeth of Cadmus, rising once more, had turned to stone. This was the Hierón of Epidauros, famous of old for its Æsculapian Sanctuary, and in our day for the finest ancient theatre yet discovered.

We had the whole place to ourselves; and, having brought luncheon, disposed of it unattended in an open pavilion, fronting the theatre, which, unlike that of Argos, was not hewn from the rock. It is a masterpiece of construction, built at the best period, on a grand scale, with stone seats rising tier on tier in the hollow of a hill. These seats are still in excellent condition, while the acoustic properties are so remarkable that probably no visitor neglects to prove them. In the upper row, two hundred feet from the orchestra and seventy-five feet above it, a line spoken upon the stage in moderate tones may be heard distinctly. The altar is standing; the exits and entrances can still be traced; and, at the wings, on either side is a steep inclined plane, for the raising of heavy stage machinery.

After devoting two hours to the theatre, the museum, and the extensive ruins of the Sanctuary, we retraced our road, overtaken by showers, which, happily, were short. By the time we reached Nauplia, the skies had cleared. From the end of the esplanade we followed a footpath out of the town, round and up the rock, to a small chapel on a grass-grown terrace high over the bay. There was no wind; the mountains were mirrored in the quiet harbor, and the changing sunset colors merged in the deep blue of the quiet sea. The Bay of Nauplia lay before us at its best. No landscape can be lovelier than this, in such conditions.

Early the next morning we started on our day's journey by rail, via Corinth, to Athens.

Waiting at the Nauplia station stood a handsome, elderly man, evidently of the higher class, in national dress of the most resplendent kind; literally, all purple and fine linen. His plaited skirt — the *fustanella* — was immaculate; his jacket, cap, and girdle were strong in color and of rich material, yet worn without consciousness of display. His dignity and well-bred air of distinction confirmed the statement, maintained by good observers, that the older generation disapproves of the modern change to conventional European costume, which has become prevalent in Athens. A few years ago he would not have been an exceptional figure; a few years hence all his splendors will be forgotten. Steam and electricity have done their work. One nation, sooner or later, must look exactly like another. Any variation, whether traditional or not, is eccentric; and eccentricity is out of fashion.

Our local train left us stranded at Argos, where we took a slow express along the plain, up into the mountains and over the high pass. There we encountered a wild storm, exciting in its variety. The wind howled, the lightning flashed, the thunder rattled, hail-stones beat upon the windows, and through their sashes pelting rain streamed in; the car-roof, likewise, leaked like paper. We changed again at Corinth, coming out upon the isthmus and crossing the canal to the northern shore of the Saronic Gulf, which, thenceforward, we followed, sometimes at the water's edge, sometimes far above it, by Salamis, through Megara to Eleusis. Then, turning inland and making a wide détour, we came, at last, to town. The streets of Athens were deep in semi-liquid mud, after the usual shower, a little more violent than usual, early in the day.

III

Our Athenian hours were numbered. When the weather permitted we revisited favorite haunts, and made several short excursions beyond the gates, guided thereto by certain friendly citizens of Athens to whom we had brought letters. One of these expeditions was to the king's summer palace at Tatóï, on a slope of Mount Parnes. The drive is wild and beautiful, through a forest of pines, with superb mountain views. On our return, as we came down into the wilderness, our grave coachman suddenly became excited over something he had seen at the roadside. He turned to us gesticulating and pointing back, repeating many times a single word,—"Alopou." Since we could not grasp its meaning, he shouted it louder and louder, much distressed; then, putting his hands to his head, he wagged them back and forth, as if to indicate long ears. "Oh! a rabbit!" we cried sympathetically, and he was entirely content. But, at dinner, that night, we asked one of the servants, who spoke English perfectly, what "alopou" really meant; and were informed that we had started up not a rabbit, but a fox! The moral of this seems to conflict with the familiar proverb. Even a little learning is less dangerous than none at all.

The site of Plato's Grove of Academe is still open to the air and sunlight. There, too, olive trees still grow, and we longed to walk among them. It lies out in the plain, westward of the city, beyond an old Botanic Garden, full of birds and bees, which is all the better for its air of luxuriant neglect. The walk to the classic shade through an ugly modern suburb that knows no care, is long and painful. It is disappointing to come out, at last, merely upon pathless, ploughed fields. These, however, are redeemed by scores of olives, really old. Through their twisted branches gleam fine, distant glimpses of the Acropolis; and the largest is known as "Plato's Tree,"—a tribute of courtesy. The walk back by another road was better. The sun set in the clearest of skies, irradiating Mount Hymettos, as we turned toward it, with the purple glow peculiar to itself,—the same whereon the eyes of Socrates looked their last. Never had we seen it to such advantage. It is not an afterglow, but a brief foreboding of the end. The sun sank behind the western hills, and, immediately, the effect vanished, leaving Hymettos, like the rest, stern, gray, and cold.

Our last day at Athens was marked by a humorous adventure, emphasizing once more the recurrence of the unexpected. We had described to our hospitable friends the delightful hour passed at the spring of Marousi early in our stay. "Ah!" they said; "but have you seen the spring of Kephisia?"—"No."—"Then go there, by all means; it is the most enchanting spot we know." Accordingly, we went,—by train, to save time,—finding Kephisia a fashionable summer resort with ornamental parkways and elaborate villas, set in formal gardens. We lunched at its chief hotel in the shade of a giant plane tree; then drove out to the spring, developing, on the way, a queer sense of familiarity; it was as if we had seen all this before in some former state, or in a dream. The mystery deepened with our approach, but, upon arrival, cleared away in a moment. Here were the ducks, the pine trees, the brimming basin of our earlier visit. The spring, flowing between two villages, was, to our coachman, the spring of Marousi,—to our good Athenians, the spring of Kephisia. We were not sorry for the misunderstanding that brought us there a second time; but we greeted the source of the dual name as an old acquaintance, not a new one.

The next morning we saw the last of the Acropolis from the train on the way to Patras,—a journey of nearly eight hours, the first three of which covered that route along the Saronic Gulf to Corinth, already traversed by us in the opposite direction. After Corinth, all was new. The road follows the Corinthian Gulf by its southern shore, from which we looked across the blue waves to

Helicon and Parnassos, up the bay of Itea to the white gleam of Delphi. Farther on, the gulf narrows gradually to a strait,—a crescent of water between high mountain-walls, whose wild gorges opened southward near at hand, as the train passed. Then we came out upon the broad Gulf of Patras, and, turning, saw, across the water, the fine, detached peak of Varássova. The clouds about its head played strange freaks with the brilliant sunset, making it seem threefold. Under this mountain stands the small town of Missolonghi, where Byron died. Opposite, on the eastern shore, is the modern, provincial city of Patras, which we reached while the fantastic sunset was still in progress. From the balcony of our hotel, overlooking the water, we watched to the end an effect unparalleled in our remembrance; and, reviewing the day's experience, agreed that the traveller's conclusion which proclaims it the finest railway journey in the world was probably just.

From Patras to Olympia is a run of more than five hours by rail. We made it early the next day, which, opening well, gave us fine views of the Ionian Sea and the islands of Cephalonia, Zante, and Ithaca. But the treacherous sky grew dark with heavy clouds, and we ran into a furious thunder-storm. The rain stopped considerately at the moment of arrival, about noon, but only to recur with provoking and enduring violence. Our afternoon, therefore, was given to the small museum, near which we lodged. Out of Athens, this has no rival except the museum of Delphi; and in popular favor it surpasses that, from the fame of its chief treasure, the Hermes of Praxiteles, — an antique almost as well known as the Venus of Melos by reproductions, conveying form without texture. The inevitable shortcoming is especially apparent in this case. For the Parian marble is of exceptional lustrous beauty, and its surface is so highly finished that it seems ready to yield at a touch, like wax. The statue has a room of honor to itself, yet, strange to say, it is badly lighted. The restoration of the legs, also, is a positive disadvantage. Involuntarily, we recalled the exclamation of disgust from the Italian care-taker, Chico, at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, upon seeing the Hermes thus made over in a newly imported cast. "*È tedesco!*" he cried indignantly, and turned away. German and deplorable that modern extension most certainly is; one longs for Thor's hammer to knock away at one blow the impertinent underpinning.

The main hall of the museum corresponds in length to the breadth of the Temple of Zeus, of which the fragmentary pediment-groups, spread out to their full extent, completely fill the two sides. Their position is lower than that they were designed to hold, so that the original effect is lost. They are much too near the eye; yet there is compensation in the opportunity thus given for close study. The shattered Victory, that once stood before the temple, suffers and gains from the same cause. The hall, admirably lighted, affords abundant space for each object. Everything there is a masterpiece in its kind; and the first impression of serene splendor is never counteracted. One lingers long in it, leaving it reluctantly, to return again and again.

The museum is the last expression of Olympia's glory. The courts, the temples, the stadium, the treasuries, the colonnades inclosing the festal square, were levelled by earthquake long ago. Immense capitals and broken shafts lie where they fell, cumbering the ground, half buried in strange wildflowers; the foundations, to be sure, are there in place; but there, more than anywhere else, it is an irritation to conjure up the superstructure by an effort of the mind. The usual way of approaching Greece, undoubtedly, is the best. One should land at Patras, and see Olympia first. Though disfigured by modern buildings, the surrounding country is still beautiful; yet lacking natural grandeur and man's adornment of the finest period, after Nauplia, Delphi, and Athens it is tame.

Returning the next afternoon, we embarked at Patras, that same night, for the island of Corfu. The city glowed with mellow light, as we rounded the end of its long pier, steaming outward into calm waters. And our easy voyage of twelve hours was cheered by the thought that we had established relations with Greece, freely, if somewhat erratically, without the intervention and the incubus of a dragoman.

IV

Corfu, the largest of the Ionian islands, lies less than two miles from the mainland of Epirus. It is thirty-five miles long, and in shape roughly resembles a dolphin, whose huge head, stretching northward, is seventeen miles in width. Its history may be summed up as one of strange vicissitude. Originally Greek, it passed to the Romans, and was held by them and their descendants through many centuries. Then, ruled intermittently by French, Turks, and Russians, it fell in the nineteenth century to the English, who governed it for nearly fifty years. Now, returned to its rightful owners, it has been incorporated into the kingdom of Greece. The capital, also called Corfu, is a compact, fortified city on the inner coast, about midway of the island, — as it were, under the dolphin's dorsal fin. Redeemed from absolute stagnation only by its garrison, it is a dull, dead-and-alive place, upon which varied foreign interests have set their mark. Certain of its streets and squares and its chief hotel, the St. George, suggest provincial England. Other quarters have come straight from Italy; one hears Italian spoken on all sides. Its resources are few; there is no art worth mentioning, and its citizens amuse themselves but sadly. It fronts the sea, yet that seems curiously remote. The port, shielded by a protecting mole, is narrow and contracted. A wide, unfrequented esplanade follows for a mile the line of the shore, on which no surf ever beats. Sluggish, unnavigable waters make off from it indefinitely, choked with seaweed, giving town and environment a depressing air of isolation, that recalls the line of "Julius Cæsar," — "bound in shallows and in miseries." One longs for activity on that far-spreading, glassy surface, for a sail that shall not be distant; but it never comes.

The charms of Corfu, however, are many and invincible, unfolding themselves in quick succession the moment one leaves the precincts of the town. Throughout the island, the roads, established by the British, are well kept up. They lead on in all directions between hedges of cactus and aloe to neat, unspoiled villages, gay with peasant-costumes of great variety, — for each village is distinguishable by its own peculiar dress. Olive groves are everywhere; not the clipped, dwarfed olive of other lands, but the olive given its full scope, growing to the dimensions of a forest tree, sometimes sixty feet in height. They are the finest olive trees in the world, and they flourish in reckless luxuriance, numbering about four million, according to the official estimate. The villas of King George and the late Empress of Austria — the latter recently acquired by the German Emperor — are splendid show-places, with glowing gardens and marble terraces on wooded heights above the inland sea. Between them stands "One Gun Battery," upon a high point overlooking a world-renowned view of the eastern coast. A small, detached rock in the foreground has been named the Ship of Ulysses. Near by it is the spot where the royal adventurer, in his Odyssey, was cast ashore, for his unconventional encounter with the Princess Nausicaa.

The northern end of the island — the dolphin's head — is wild and mountainous. Our longest excursion led us that way to the monastery of Palaeokastrizza — a drive of more than three hours from town. The secluded retreat is perched upon a promontory jutting out into the open sea; and its cloisters overhang precipitous shores, deeply indented, backed by the frowning peak of Mount Ercole on the north. Ruined castles stand high on the red cliffs, which, below, are scored with caverns; and they curve around inaccessible bits of yellow beach, where long rollers break from the vivid blue into sheets of foam. Looking out upon this prospect, we lingered in court and garden under flowering pergolas, to gossip with the genial monks while our horses rested; then, in the late afternoon, we took to the road again, meeting troops of shy, wondering peasants on their way home from a day's work in the fields.

Following a pleasant Corfiote custom, we had brought dinner with us; and, just at twilight, we established ourselves in an olive grove to eat it comfortably. The host of a small wayside inn, near by, aided us most amiably in this, bringing chairs and a table, which he spread under one of the gigantic trees. He hung a lantern overhead, and served most excellent coffee after dinner. It was a warm June evening, with no sign of dampness. Innumerable fireflies glanced about, and in the treetops owls hooted distantly. The full moon rose, flinging wondrous shadows far and wide. By its clear light we drove on, along a beach, opposite the Turkish coast, which at that hour loomed very near; starting up, at intervals, detachments of the coast-guard on the lookout for smugglers, who ply their evasive trade successfully, in spite of the active patrol. The villages were silent, barred and shuttered for the night, with only an occasional gleam from some belated café. But the town, when we entered it at half-past ten, was still wide awake, stirring about the booths of an open-air market in one of the principal thoroughfares.

This was our last and best experience. The next morning came a scirocco, which held until our departure, a day or two later. We sailed in the afternoon, touching that night at the cheerless port of Santiquaranta on the Turkish shore; and, at daybreak, landing at Brindisi, were instantly in touch once more with the bustling Western World.

Midsummer in Tuscany

Midsummer in Tuscany

I

THERE is fashion in foreign travel, as in all conventional phases of modern life; and, following it, hordes of travellers migrate northward from Italy the moment that summer-heat begins, by overcrowding Switzerland, the Tyrol, and other continental high places to deprive them of half their charm. Thus it happens that real lovers of Italy, who, knowing the land well already, long to know it still better, now find the times before and after the so-called season much the best for their enjoyment. In Tuscany, no time is to be avoided by the truly discreet, apart from that same "season" itself, except, perhaps, the late autumn and early winter. Then, the days shorten with provoking swiftness, the chilly nights grow correspondingly long. One does not, from choice, seek a sunny clime to settle down for the evening over guidebooks in a musty inn-parlor, at three of the afternoon.

At all other periods of the year, the Tuscan life passes chiefly out-of-doors. There is the place to turn acquaintance with it into friendship, to become part and parcel of it, by doing as the Tuscans do. In apprehensive moments, when the sun-god, poised directly overhead, has put on all his splendors which blaze with withering potency, to dash into the throng and be swept away by it may seem, after all, the wisest course; but the blighting tourist and his cut-and-dried table d'hôte are common things, easily attainable. For choice Italian and *fonduta con tartufi*, under a vine-clad pergola, there must be concessions.

In Florence, at the end of June, we had outstayed the last lingering strangers. The Lungarno was deserted, and our hotel, near the Ponte Vecchio, remained open only to us and the barbaric tribes of personally-conducted excursionists, — "caravans," the Italians call them, — that descended upon it, at irregular intervals, for twenty-four hours of rush and repentance. The siesta prolonged itself indefinitely in the broiling afternoons. Our Florentine friends, to be sure, said that the heat had not yet begun; for their part, they meant to stay on in town a whole week longer; but they had a lovely garden, with green alleys and shaded nooks, framed for repose, — and we had not.

Dining with them one night, under their

ilexes and magnolias, we announced our intention of taking refuge, the next day, in the upper air of the Casentino valley, near the Arno's headwaters. Thereupon, the expression of approving envy was unanimous. All knew the favored region well; all spoke of it at once, in general terms of rapture. When we tried pinning them down to details in the way of helpful guidance, except for unqualified admiration of Camaldoli, no two opinions were alike. Having ample time at our disposal, we wanted to go everywhere and see everything. What was the best method of approach? we asked. Where were the best inns? Above all, which point was best fitted to serve as headquarters for daily excursions?

An animated discussion followed, and continued until a late hour; but we came out of it into the dark streets more in the dark than ever, after many minute directions, tangled inextricably in a confusion of names, of which we were entirely ignorant.

One had insisted upon our going east; another, south. As to inns, there was an excellent one at Camaldoli. We had really retained only one important fact, viz.: that none of the party had journeyed into the Casentino for at least ten years. As to present conditions there, they knew rather less than we knew ourselves. We returned to the hotel and its guidebooks, all pleasantly vague and aggravatingly brief concerning our destination; and, finally, we determined to be guided solely by innate intelligence, making our own mistakes and correcting them, or not, as circumstance permitted.

We set forth, late in the afternoon, upon a middle course of our own selection, going neither east nor south, but southeast to Arezzo, at the lower end of the valley. Laughing Arezzo, the home of Petrarch and Vasari, with its clear fountains, fine churches, streets of stairs, and grassy hilltop, is the gayest of provincial Tuscan cities. We knew it well, however, from a former visit; and as it now seemed hotter even than Florence, if such a thing were possible, we changed at once into a narrow-gauge train for Stia, at the valley's head; on our upward way deliberately passing by with a glance Bibbiena, Poppi, and other recognized halting-places. Among these, we liked best the aspect of Poppi, which stands on a hill in the middle of the valley, its houses clustering about a high-shouldered mediæval castle. As the station is a mile away from it, we had a good view of the town, and began to wonder if we might not go farther and fare worse; yet the guidebook gave us no encouragement; it barely mentioned the inn at Poppi, while that of Stia was strongly recommended. On the platform, watching the train go by, were five pretty girls, whose demeanor and dress suggested a high state of civilization. Surely, a good hotel must exist where such as these were to be found; but it was now too late to get off, and the train went on, taking us with it.

At the next station occurred one of those long, inexplicable delays, so familiar to the traveller in Italy. The sun went down, and twilight settled over the cool, green valley, shut in by wooded heights. Vaguely, toward the north, we distinguished the lofty peak of Falterona, in a gorge of which the Arno rises. At last we started up again, passing slowly through Pratovecchio, under the castle of Romena, one of Dante's refuges, near whose crumbling walls once flowed his spring of Fonte Branda, now extinct. Then, at nine o'clock, we reached the terminus of Stia, and drove on in the dark through the shadowy town, up a hill, to our hotel at the end of a long, curving piazza, the Borgo Maestro. The place, unquestionably, was primitive. Our welcoming host and hostess, with their daughter, did the honors and the service too. Their macaroni and Chianti wine were of the right sort, however, and our chamber window looked down a narrow street to a bridge over the river which murmured pleasantly through the dark arches. Beyond we caught a glimpse of a hillside, dotted with farmhouses, straggling up towards the stars. The prospect, if limited, had some promise in it. We went to bed, tired and doubtful, yet not without hope.

The next day our hope gradually dwindled almost to the vanishing-point. The inn, whither the finger of authority had directed us, was intolerably stuffy and comfortless. We fled from it at once, out-of-doors. There the town, rude, confined, and architecturally uninteresting, lay deep in a hollow of the hills which excluded every breath of air. The sun flamed piteously in an unclouded sky; and we turned our slow, languid steps away from stone walls and pavements, without the town, to a grassy slope by the river, where, under the shade of an oak, we sank down exhausted. The air had no life; even here the heat was indescribably oppressive, but, so long as we sat in the shade, we could endure it; and, except for brief intervals at meal-times, there we sat all day, clinging to the shadow in its course.

On all sides were delightful things. We looked down the valley toward Arezzo, up it to the rough sides of Mount Falterona. White roads, intersected by grass-grown paths, wound over the hills, suggesting pleasant walks in other conditions of temperature. At our feet the Arno rushed along its rocky bed, broadening, a few yards off, into a pool overshadowed by a huge boulder,—an ideal swimming-place, where men and boys of the town disported themselves continuously. They were hidden from sight by the rock, but we could hear them shouting and splashing as we whiled away the desperate hours over our books. Slowly, very slowly, with no abatement in relentless fervor, the sun declined; yet at six o'clock the heat seemed to increase rather than to diminish. Not until after seven, when the last ray was quenched, could we venture out to explore a river-path that lured us for a mile or two up into a tangled wilderness, now at the water's level, now high up on the bank. Then, overtaken by darkness, we came back to the valley and the town. All, now, was life and movement; so deliciously cool that, once more, we half believed in Stia, and decided to trust it for another day.

Our second day, however, was a tiresome duplicate of the first. An intermittent breeze in the early hours made it possible to change our position, and go farther afield, but as a mere search for the deepest shade reduced energy to its lowest terms, no attempt at exploration could be even considered; our day-dreams were bounded by coolness and tranquillity. When the sun went down, ambition revived. We walked as far as Pratovecchio; then, crossing the river, climbed the heights of the farther shore, to turn back through the open country in the waning light. There were stone farmhouses, with walled stable-yards; tributary torrents hurried to the Arno, under broad acres of chestnut forest extending down the slopes to Stia's roofs and bridges. The whole walk was happily and beautifully Tuscan, but its charms did not delude us. We had given Stia a fair trial, and found it wanting. The important thing, now, was to try elsewhere.

Early the next morning, in a renewal of the intense heat, we parted company with our friendly host and his family. On their side the parting was a sad one; evidently, they had counted upon us for a longer stay. We took the train to Poppi, — a run of twenty minutes only, — meaning to lunch there, see the castle, and go on. At Poppi station we were met, first, by a refreshing breeze, that seemed suddenly let loose in the open valley; next, by a light-hearted cabman, who immediately befriended us. "The new inn has a fine position, — will you go there?" he asked. We accepted the suggestion, and inquired if the inn were much frequented. "I should think so!" said he; "it is nearly always crowded,—though, just now, you will, perhaps, find room." As we slowly ascended, he pointed out important features of the landscape, which opened up on all sides. There were the craggy peaks of La Verna; the town below, a little to the south, was Bibbiena; Camaldoli lay out of sight, beyond the bare, brown ridge on the north-east, two hours away. So, always mounting higher, we made half the circuit of the town walls, to enter at its western gate; climbing on within, through well-paved, airy streets, by churches, domed and porticoed. One of these fronted a small square, built around a central fountain. There were busy shops and crowded arcades; all had an air of thrift; the people turned toward us friendly, hospitable faces.

Our way led beyond the fountain, up a steeper incline than any we had passed. At the end of it we made a sharp turn to the right, and came out upon a broad, terraced plateau, shaded with lime trees, commanding at various points uninterrupted views of the valley. One end was closed in by the old castle and its tower; at the other a gate opened upon the garden of the new inn.

The cool breeze rustled in the limes. High above them the castle-bells chimed the hour. We looked at each other in silent wonder, with all plans for going on, that day, cancelled upon the instant; here, in the Casentino as we had hoped to find it, already beginning to doubt if we could ever cheerfully go on.

The doubt became a certainty as the day proceeded. Our inn, which bore the name of the Conti Guidi, who were once lords of the castle, was comfortable in its appointments, exquisitely clean; its food, wine, and service left nothing to be desired. Since our arrival was at least three weeks in advance of the season, we had no difficulty in finding room, according to the cabman's word,—in fact, we were for the moment its only visitors, free to choose the quarters that pleased us best, overlooking the garden and the castle-tower. On that side, the house was low and unpretentious; on the other, it sprang into many stories directly from the fountain-square. The windows of its pleasant reading-room were almost on a level with the opposite church-dome, beyond which they looked out over the valley; while, from the square below, an arcaded street curved down the hill. The town has slight architectural importance; but the general effect is good, and no modern disfigurement mars its simple individuality.

The glory of Poppi is the castle, built in the thirteenth century by Arnolfo di Cambio, architect of the Palazzo Vecchio at Florence, to which, outwardly, it bears a strong resemblance. The inner court, with its stone staircase, is more suggestive of another Florentine fortress, the Bargello; though the suggestion does not go very far, for the staircase at Poppi, the earlier of the two by half a century, has distinction peculiarly its own. On one of its upper landings is a small fresco of Dante and Beatrice, commemorating the poet's visit. Other important frescoes, attributed to Spinello Aretino, adorn the chapel, to which one passes through a long series of decorated halls and chambers, some in good condition, some dilapidated. The latter are undergoing a process of restoration, carefully considered, by no means overdone; and enough of the original work remains to make the building, as it stands, a splendid monument of its time.

We devoted our morning to the castle; our afternoon to a thorough inspection of the town, within and without. The strong breeze continued, freshening at times to a gale, which brought occasional showers. Early in the afternoon walk we came upon the five maidens whom we had seen at the station, now decorously taking the air under the guidance of a duenna. In after days we often met them thus defended. Even in that quiet corner of the land they never went out alone. We heard that they were the daughters of a distinguished citizen; but we failed to discover his name, and did not identify his house. His children, as peripatetic landmarks, grew familiar. We called them, between ourselves, the five sisters of Poppi, —using the phrase lightly, yet respectfully, in accordance with their grave propriety, so watched and governed. Unprofaned by modern progress, they seemed pathetically appropriate to the place in their enforced seclusion.

Poppi had gained our confidence, which developed into strong affection. We made it our resting-place, our home in the Casentino, leaving it for days together, but always returning to it with joy. There was no more discomfort from heat anywhere. We shook our fists at distant Stia, deprecating treacherous guidebooks, repenting our own virtue of patience that had put up with it so long.

That night, after dinner, we combined

with our landlord in engaging a vetturino to take charge of our longer expeditions. His looks promised well; so did his name, which was Angelo. He proved, indeed, to be an angel among vetturini,—competent, intelligent, moderate in his demands, strictly honest, and careful of his horses. Unusually silent, reserved, even, for a Tuscan, he could speak to the point upon occasion. He dignified his office. Our remembrance of the long, bright days that followed is associated always with his fidelity.

There are delightful walks about Poppi, in the valley and over the nearer hills. On one of these, in a dense grove, stands an old Jesuit monastery, the white walls contrasting with the dark foliage to make it conspicuous for miles. The place is used as a summer retreat for dignitaries of the order; but since none of these happened to be present, the gate opened for our admission to the innermost depths of the thicket, which otherwise would have proved impenetrable.

Through the chestnut woods of other hillsides we could stroll at pleasure. Once, however, we came to a wall with a sign upon it, warning off trespassers; but the way opened up invitingly; the gate stood open too, and, disregarding the sign, we walked on,—not without misgiving,—when, at a turn of the road, we saw a house, which, plainly, was inhabited. None the less, we lingered there in the twilight to watch the rising moon. Then, suddenly, at our backs, we heard voices; a dog burst out upon us from the underbrush; behind him, drawing nearer, we caught a sound that seemed the gentle tread of many feet. It was an awkward moment. How, taken thus red-handed, should we explain our intrusion to the approaching family group? What if the five sisters of Poppi dwelt here, and those light footsteps were their own, on the home-stretch of the daily promenade! Would the duenna accept our special pleading? We started up in humiliating confusion, to face only a drove of hogs urged forward against their will by two small peasant-boys, who must have been perplexed by the laughter in which our anxiety found relief. We escaped, unchallenged, scot-free; and taking to heart the wholesome lesson, we refrained from further trespass.

Our first long excursion was to the ancient abbey of Camaldoli, by a steep road over a treeless spur of the Apennines, between La Verna and Falterona. The horizon widened in all directions as we left the valley; then the valley was shut out, and at the bottom of a deep, barren ravine which the road skirted, we saw the little town of Maggiona, a bright spot amid gray, volcanic devastation. As we went higher, all grew wilder and rougher; but at the top of the ridge we looked off upon wooded mountain-ranges, across another valley, into which a stream dashed from the heights through acres of forest-trees. We followed it up, until, on its bank, at the edge of a pine forest near the valley's head, we came to the monastic buildings, standing there alone in one huge pile, bound together by a series of courts and cloisters.

The monastery, twenty-seven hundred feet above sea-level, was founded by Saint Romualdo in the eleventh century. The present buildings, designed by Vasari, replace the older structure, which had withstood many sieges to be ruined at last by fire and rapine. The strangers' quarters have been converted into a "Grand Hotel," the summer refuge of diplomats, native and foreign. Their season had hardly begun; but every day brought detachments of the advance guard, clothed in conventionality, to give the vaulted rooms and corridors of the historic house a formal air, contrasting strangely with the cloistered simplicity on the other side of the wall. The high-bred visitors never strayed far into the forest, where nearly all our waking hours were spent. Its paths are many; but our favorite walks were those along its most beautiful of mountain torrents, remarkable for the volume of water, broken by moss-covered boulders into innumerable cascades. To sit by one of these and watch it leap from sunlight to shadow, between the trunks of the great pines, refreshed body and soul alike. There were deep, quiet pools and brawling rapids, infinitely various; and everywhere around us, above green depths of solitude, the illimitable forest stretched its protecting arms. Occasionally, we met one of the white-robed monks, or some uniformed official of the governmental Forestry School, which flourishes in a complete establishment, a mile away, down the valley; but, oftener, we were the only disturbers of the peace. We soon found that our reminiscent Florentines, expressive as they tried to be, had but half expressed the enchantment of Camaldoli.

At the end of a woodland path in a small clearing, nearly a thousand feet above the monastery, is the Sacro Eremo,—a Benedictine settlement, to which certain of the order retire for the austerities of a hermit life. It is a walled village of a single street, where the snug, convenient houses are detached, each abode standing in its cultivated plot of ground. The monks meet daily at mass in the common church, but silence is enforced, and otherwise they live apart in strict seclusion. We found them at prayer; and when the service ended, one, detailed for the purpose, welcomed the strangers hospitably. He was glad to talk, to answer questions, to display his own well-appointed quarters, his private garden. Its terrace had a wondrous view southward toward the Arno and Arezzo; but all his thoughts, so far as we could follow them, were bounded by the tranquil hermitage.

Turning to the open country, one finds Camaldoli encircled by lofty peaks that tempt the mountain-climber; and along their foothills, good roads for the unambitious lead to the School of Forestry, before-mentioned, and to Serravalle, a small town, or townlet, on a high rock jutting out over the river Archiano, one of the Arno's important branches. On our way back to Poppi we left the turnpike to explore the Archiano valley, driving a long distance, as far as the mountain-village of Badia a Prataglia, which stands even higher than Camaldoli. There is no forest; but its good inns and cheery villas have made it, for Tuscans, one of the habitable retreats in the Casentino.

The drive from Poppi to La Verna is longer and more varied than that to Camaldoli. In rounding the base of the hill on which Bibbiena stands, we came, at a bend of the road, upon a fine old monastery, — the Madonna del Sasso, containing an interesting Robbia altar-piece and other quaintly distinctive decorations of the same school. Further on we climbed a steep ridge to plunge into the wooded gorge beyond it; then, after fording a shallow stream at its lowest point, we climbed again, under sturdy oaks, to wind-swept tracts of upland marsh and stony pasture. Here, looking back, we appeared already to have reached the summit of the world; but, forward, afar off, the sandstone rocks of La Verna, rudely splintered by earthquake long ago, sprang sharply up against the sky. As we drew nearer, the monastery buildings slowly detached themselves from dark recesses, closed in by woods of pine and beech, spreading on to the highest point, the peak of La Penna. Below the monastery gate we drew up in a small cluster of houses; among them stood our inn, a poor, unalluring place, reached by a stone staircase, open to all the world.

We had driven for more than three hours, into early afternoon. So we ordered immediately our first meal, which, though simple, was surprisingly good. The inn dogs, "Pisare" and "Tago," eagerly helped to eat it; and one of the gentler sex, who did not belong there, dashed upstairs persistently to share it with them; but "Pisare"—a yellow mongrel—constituted himself our special protector, and at a sign from us, for which he always waited, hunted the intruder down again as often as she appeared.

We had planned to pass the night, and asked to be shown our lodging. Over that hung a cloud of mystery. We were to be accommodated, but in what precise position no one at the moment could decide. All depended upon some incident that might or might not happen,—an arrival, or the reverse. Resigning ourselves to uncertainty, we left our luggage in a corner of the only room we had seen, and went off to pay our first visit to the sanctuary. We scaled the steep by a paved road that winds up to the principal entrance,—an arched gateway, leading to an open court which is the centre of the whole system. At one end was the church, with its campanile; at the other, a stone terrace, with a statue of Saint Francis and a covered well; on either side, dormitories, chapels, and cloisters closed in the precincts; mysterious stairways led down to caverns in the rock, and from the terrace-wall was an outlook over all the land. The bells rang in the tower; then, through a cloistered ambulatory, the monks filed toward us in a long procession. We followed them into the church, and watched the impressive service; after which, one of the monks, stepping aside to greet us cordially, devoted himself to our entertainment for the rest of the afternoon.

He was young, merry, intelligent, and filled with a desire to impart information, legendary or otherwise. From him we learned more of Saint Francis than we had ever known before. We were shown his stone bed in a dank cave; the innermost retreat, wherein he fasted during the Lenten season; the cliff from which the Devil hurled him; the rock below it, which melted into wax to receive him unharmed. Up and down we went, indoors and out, attended always by our illuminating guide, who, leaving no arcana unexplained, kept for his choicest disclosure the chapel built upon the spot where the Saint received the Stigmata. There, three times a week, at midnight, the monks gather to scourge themselves in commemoration of the miraculous event. The small building enshrines a glorious Robbia crucifixion. We returned through the arcaded passage to the church, and, after accepting an urgent invitation to lunch at the monastery on the following day, were left to study other works of the Robbia school collected there, — one, a beautiful Annunciation, probably from Luca's own hand. Then, outside in the court, we joined a party of visiting Italians, bent upon seeing the view from La Penna. As the matrons in charge were unequal to the climb, there had been provided for them a "treggia,"— that curious native vehicle, in form merely a triangular wooden sledge, resembling a snow-plough. The women, seated upon it, were drawn by two white oxen, grave-eyed and deliberate, up the forest-path which often became no path at all; while the rest of us toiled on foot beside them to Dante's

> "... rude rock 'twixt Tiber and the Arno,"

where the view was well worth all our pains. We stood upon a crest of the Apennines, looking north at Falterona, the Arno's source; northeast at Mount Fumajolo, the Tiber's. Between the two stretched an uninhabited wilderness of mountain, gorge, and forest. Here were the "antres vast and deserts idle" of Shakespeare, the *selva oscura* of the Inferno, cut off from the world of men by the solemn wood behind us. Through it, descending by another path, we came out into the open fields, and, toward sunset, strolled back to the inn across a green paddock into which Angelo had turned our horses.

The quarters reserved for us, though meagre, were the best that the house afforded.

They really belonged to the resident doctor, who has the health of the monks in his keeping. Absent, now, on a short vacation, he had fixed that very day for his return; but, at nightfall, there was still no sign of him. We earnestly hoped that he would not turn up, when we found ourselves installed among his personal effects. Books and private papers lay scattered upon the writing-table; there were photographs, too, inscribed with tender messages, — surely, not for strange eyes. We tried to imagine what he was like and what remarks he would make, if, coming home at dead of night, he should find us in possession. Fortunately, he did not come, and, later, we understood why. For, by a strange chance, within a fortnight, we met friends of his in another part of Tuscany, and were told that he had just been married. We pictured, mentally, the bringing home of the bride, and wondered how long she would be content with a life of sequestration amid such poor surroundings.

The next morning we revisited the sanctuary, well in advance of our luncheon-appointment, for another service there. Out of the sparkling sunshine, as before, the monks filed through the cloister and knelt around us on the pavement of the dimly lighted church, from which they are never long absent, since eight hours in every twenty-four are given to devotion. When our meal was ready, we were conducted through vaulted corridors to a small refectory, hung with colored prints illustrating the lives of the saints. There, apart from other guests, we were served by one of the friars. The cook, also of the order, came to pay us his respects. He was a native of Siena, and he dwelt upon details of his former life with a kind of hungry eagerness. His father and brothers were still living in the city, and he was permitted to pay them occasional visits, which, clearly, came none too often. After luncheon we took a long walk southward over the sheep-pastures to the ruined castle of Chiusi, where Michael Angelo's father lived for a while, as lord of the commune. The master, himself, was born in the town of Caprese, a few miles distant down the valley, though his association with this remote region must have been of the slightest; for, in his infancy, he was removed to Settignano, near Florence, thus becoming to all intents and purposes a Florentine.

Late in the afternoon our own Angelo harnessed up to drive us back into the world. On the way we turned aside through Bibbiena, chiefly to assure ourselves that we had made no mistake in preferring Poppi to it as an abiding-place. Our accidental preference was confirmed. For though the town is well placed on its hill-summit, the streets seemed narrow and dark in our inevitable comparison. We missed our towered castle, our cool, shaded terrace, which we hailed with delight, as we wound toward them in the afterglow. Arriving, we found Poppi al!

astir with preparations for the Madonna's feast, to be celebrated on the morrow. Such a festival in Italy, beginning always on the preceding day, ends only on the day after. The first procession was already forming in the depths of the fountain-square, below our windowed eyrie. We watched the start, as we dined luxuriously, happy to be at home again.

The next day, one function succeeded another from dawn until after dark. There were services in all the churches; a church parade, in which an image of the Madonna was borne in state through all the streets; another, in which it was borne back again. Certain representatives of the various quarters took part in these processions, — an honor highly coveted. This year, the children of our host were among the chosen. They wore their very best clothes; and the whole house assumed an air of distinction, by which we profited. Unfortunately, the day was showery; but the gay crowd minded the raindrops little, the children minded them less. As the clouds considerately dispersed in time for the illuminations, we all sat up late, and went to bed tired, yet undaunted.

Too soon came the time of our departure. Early one fine morning Angelo drew up at the garden-gate for his last and longest expedition,—a drive of more than four hours out of the Casentino, over the hills and far away,—as far as Vallombrosa. At first, all was thrice familiar. We drove north through the chestnut woods above ruined Romena, looking backward upon Pratovecchio and the wide valley; forward upon Stia, simmering in the sun. To the west, near at hand, stood the ruins of another castle, San Niccolò. Our road lay beyond it, over arid ridges in long succession. We climbed them slowly into air that grew Alpine in its exhilaration. Now and then we passed a wayside tavern, displaying its withered wine-bush; or some mountain-village of the humblest sort. In one of these, at the foot of a steep hill, a peasant-girl added a third horse to our equipage, and proceeded with us up the incline for a mile, or more. She was a cheerful, rosy being, who chattered merrily with us as she walked beside the wheels.

So we went westward, up the Consuma Pass, to the squalid village of Consuma at its highest point. The name, thus reiterated, has a history. It is derived from the dreadful sentence executed here, toward the close of the thirteenth century, upon Dante's Maestro Adamo, who recounts his own misdeeds in the Inferno. Tried and condemned for counterfeiting golden florins at the instigation of the lords of Romena, he was burned alive at the roadside. Here, at the village inn, we stopped to refresh our horses; then we began the descent, turning sharply toward the south, to take a road newly planned, at many points still unfinished, which brought us by a short cut into the Vallombrosan shades. There, in Milton's woody theatre, under the monastery tower, we took leave of Angelo, — undemonstratively, of course, as befitted his dignity; yet, on our side, the parting was one of real regret, in which it is to be hoped that he, too, had some share. He returned into his native valley, and we hurried to our belated luncheon at the Forest Inn.

We stood upon terms of old acquaintance with Vallombrosa, — a memorable spot, well known to all the world, at least by reputation. Yet coming out into it, as we now did, from the by-paths of the Casentino, the scene looked swept and garnished, — almost like a mere suburb of Florence, whose pinnacles glittered in the sunlight, far below. We loved the quiet walks on the pine-clad hillside, the smooth, green meadow in the foreground, with its dancing trees; but the modern villas were aggressively conspicuous. The discordant Grand Hotel a mile away, at Saltino, was out of sight, yet we felt its presence; and there overflowed from it a multitude of transient foreigners, suggesting an afternoon picnic, incongruously organized. A cable-railway has made the approach too easy; to enjoy it fully in these later days, one must see Vallombrosa before, not after, Camaldoli. We lingered on a few hours to revive old memories, and then sought fresher woods and newer pastures, coming down to Florence for a single night on the way. The heat there had really begun at last. The Florentines were all gone; and even the "caravan," hourly threatened, did not come.

II

All Italian travellers must remember the distressing series of tunnels through the mountains on the direct railway-route between Florence and Bologna. Issuing from one of these midway of the line, at its highest level, the train stops at Pracchia, an insignificant village in a narrow gorge, where the river Reno meets its rushing tributary, the Maresca. The place looks unpromising; and its chief attraction proves, in fact, to be the excellent inn, which is a good starting-point for high flights into the Pistoian Apennines.

We had passed the night there; and the next day, after luncheon, on exploration bent, we left the region of tunnels behind, driving westward from the gorge into an open valley, along the highroad leading down to Lucca, which is only twenty miles off. Like all highroads the world over, this is now infested by motor-cars; but we soon turned aside from its dusty traffic to scale serene heights on which the restless devotee of rapid transit is content to gaze when passing. Up we went between woods and corn-fields, until in a short hour and a half we had reached our destination, Gavinana, a diminutive town on a craggy spur of the mountain.

Gavinana is surrounded by fine old chestnut woods. The neighboring walks are of primal Tuscan beauty; but the place itself, cramped and comparatively featureless, shows from without more picturesqueness than is sustained within. It clings fondly to the merited renown of a local patriot, Ferruccio, who fell in battle near the town, struggling vainly for Tuscan independence, in 1530, just before the restoration of the Medici. His house still stands in the small piazza, and the inn, opposite, has been given his name. One escapes gladly, however, from narrow streets and dull walls to roam over the free hillsides, under chestnuts centuries old, which must have flourished in their prime when the great battle was fought among them. The hut that sheltered the dying hero is pointed out, and his memory distinguishes all the pleasant land. Another claim to distinction exists in its pure, native speech, which, everywhere, even among the humblest, has no trace of provincial patois.

Here, in and out of Gavinana, we passed delightful days. Her citizens were hospitable; so, too, were the outlying farmers, their wives and children. Our fellow-lodgers at the Albergo Ferruccio chanced to be cordial, friendly Florentines. With them, one night, we watched from our inn-balcony the open-air performance of a strolling circus which settled down for the evening upon the pavement of the square. By day we walked onward to the pretty town of San Marcello at the valley's foot; or back, over the hills, to Maresca village by its rapid stream, coming there upon a festal celebration which had drawn in half the countryside.

Then, one morning, we drove on,— still westward, first, to San Marcello; thence, crossing the river Lima, we began at once to ascend the cliffs forming its right bank, by a toilsome, zigzag road.

The Lima, with its full, swift current, is one of the most beautiful and also one of the most treacherous among mountain rivers. Ten miles lower down, meeting the Serchio at Bagni di Lucca, it brings perpetual refreshment to the shady gorge, which, in summer, has long been a favorite refuge of Lucca's citizens from their glowing plain. There, coursing smoothly, the Lima seems a mild and placid stream. But here, above San Marcello, it dashes from its mountain-source at all seasons in tremendous vigor, making a sharp turn to plough a channel for itself down through the foothills. Swollen by spring and autumn rains, it surges above its confined bed at a moment's notice, with fearful turbulence, into a destructive force against which the whole land is fortified. Huge stone dikes, that look stout enough to repel an army, defend the roads and even the everlasting hills themselves. On this July day, as we passed, the water was, comparatively, low; yet it broke upon these barriers so furiously, that we needed no stronger hint of its dangerous possibilities.

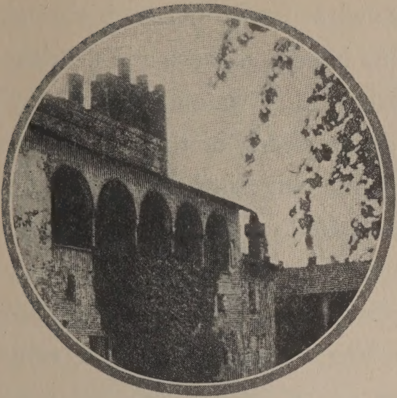
We had entered the old road which runs from Pistoia to Modena over the Abetone Pass; and, leaving the Lima far below us, we went upward and onward, until in another hour, at the height of two thousand feet, we had reached the level of Cutigliano on the opposite shore. This was barely midway in the long ascent. The red-roofed town soon became a mere speck in the distance; around and above us opened a vast natural amphitheatre, into the heart of which we climbed. At the end of the third hour we came out upon a long ridge overgrown with firs; then drove straight on through the village of Boscolungo and beyond it, to the outlying inn, which stands, encircled by the forest, at the top of the pass, near the point where the road turns abruptly, to wind down again from the ridge on the Modena side.

This turn of the road — four thousand, five hundred feet above the sea — gives a splendid panoramic outlook over the further valley. It is marked by two monumental stone pyramids, erected by a Duke of Modena in the eighteenth century, to commemorate his improvement of the road-bed. Below them, an ugly modern village of hotels and *pensions* follows for half a mile the first stage of the descent; but a whole day had passed before we discovered these ill-judged signs of progress. On the Pistoian side all was beautiful. Our windows looked upon the forest, and over it to jagged summits, near and far away. In the foreground was a small green clearing of half an acre, dotted with wild-flowers. We went down into it, gathering more than fifty varieties in a single hour. Then we took to the woods, and walked miles there in our first afternoon. We could have accomplished easily twice their sum, for the air had a bracing purity that immediately dispelled all sense of fatigue. Merely to breathe it was a joy. We seemed to have attained some playground on Olympian heights, where exertion in all its forms became unwearying pleasure. We were like the horses, who, let loose into the meadows, began at once to prance and gambol and roll upon the grass ecstatically. The first effect did not wear off; it increased, rather, day by day. At Abetone, the feet of man and beast alike are perpetually winged.

The forest, like that of Camaldoli, is in governmental charge, maintained with great care. Much of it has been freed from underbrush; there the excellent paths, provided with seats at intervals, are distinguished by royal names; there, too, over chasms artfully bridged, park-like avenues lead through the pines to open vistas or to some inner clearing thickly overshadowed. One may go on and on, however, into wilder tracts, as yet unreclaimed by the foresters. There are brooks to follow, rough slopes to climb for glimpses of distant torrents, roaring into gulfs impassable. There the charcoal-burners work over their primitive kilns,—low mounds of earth rudely heaped on the hillside. Once, in a narrow wood-road, down rocky steeps, we came unexpectedly upon a huge stone arch, grass-grown, that spanned a foaming rapid at the bottom of the ravine. Beyond, the rapid widened into a pool, on the brink of which stood a ruined mill, half hidden by the undergrowth, — like the bridge, invisible from above; but from below, the solid arch, defying time and nature, rose grandly against the sky. The place looked deserted, abandoned, — forgotten, as we at once began to hope, — unknown, perhaps, to any but ourselves. In that hope we selfishly refrained from mentioning the Ponte Discreto, as we named the bridge, to our chance acquaintances of the inn. Since then, we have withheld the clue to its hiding-place, religiously, from all the world. That, as we trust, is still our secret, to be kept always unrevealed. For we mean to go back some day — the earlier day, the better — to rediscover the lost trail.

In due course, we returned by Gavinana to Pracchia, thence proceeding through the tunnels toward Venice and the sea. On the journey we wondered if Abetone really is, as one of our Florentine friends declares, the finest spot on earth. Our limited knowledge of the planet leaves the question still unsolved; but so far as that knowledge goes, "at least," to quote Hamlet with a difference, "it may be so in Tuscany;" for no spot there springs up in our remembrance to compete with it, — except, perhaps, Camaldoli.

Bergamo and the Bergamasque Alps



Bergamo and the Bergamasque Alps

WE cherished stimulative memories of an autumnal visit to the provincial Lombard city, so adroitly adjusted to incompatible levels by the tunnelled funicular tramway which makes two cities one; but the last of November is not the best season for Bergamo. It had been windy, gray, and cold there; so cold, that we had filled our pockets with newly roasted chestnuts to warm our hands, as we made a brisk circuit of the bastions, watching the day's last flicker die out early in the afternoon. Then we had gone shivering down in the dark to our inn of the lower city ; an inn draughtily constructed around an open, galleried court, needing summer heat to make it really habitable. The next day we had reluctantly curtailed our visit, having seen much, but leaving much to await a better opportunity.

Now, in August, the opportunity came, introducing us to a very different Bergamo. The upper city, with its Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance mingled in reckless confusion, was of genial warmth. We loitered on the ramparts in the long twilight, looking southward over the green Lombard plain, and northward up the Brembo and Serio valleys to Alpine heights tinged by the afterglow. When we strolled down under murmuring leaves to the lower city, every door stood open ; the citizens swarmed in the streets, where some of them kept up a lively commotion all night long. We offset their noisy unrest by their enviable Italian gayety, and slept in spite of everything.

Bergamo, lying off the main line of travel, is never overburdened with strangers. Those who turn aside for it find the better welcome in consequence to a city that well rewards their pains. For these Siamese twins of Italy still retain much of that pleasant individuality which, as the chronicles relate, distinguished their prolonged subjection to Venice. Here flourished the Venetian painter, Lorenzo Lotto, long enough to leave many examples of his work behind him. His altar-pieces abound in the churches, and his Marriage of Saint Catherine is given the centre of a panel in the small but remarkable picture gallery. Its custodian, who considerately effaces himself, finely reserved, calls the gallery "discreet;" speaking the modest word with an emphasis that sounds a note of praise none too extravagant. His charge has recently been enriched by the legacy of the art-critic, Morelli, who bequeathed a rare collection of old masters to the town.

The extraordinary cluster of buildings about the central piazza of the upper city makes it one of the most interesting squares in Italy. The old Gothic town-house of the Broletto extends across it upon three lofty arches. In one corner is an outer stairway to the upper story, behind which a fine Ghibelline tower cuts into the sky. Opposite is the unfinished Renaissance palace of Scamozzi; and the Broletto arches lead through open colonnades to the Romanesque façade of Santa Maria Maggiore, with its curious lion-portals, flanked by the Colleoni chapel, rich in sculptured detail. On one side of a small, inner square is the Baptistery; on the other, the Renaissance front of the Cathedral. All gain dignity from the odd nook in which one comes upon them from the arcade, startled at the discovery; as, in the old days, Notre Dame, at Paris, was first seen across its narrow Parvis, before modern improvement, seeking to heighten an effect, actually dwarfed its noble towers.

The interior of Santa Maria, though floridly restored, long ago, in the baroque style, is of admirable proportions. Its walls are hung throughout with Flemish tapestries, and the choir-stalls are inlaid with wonderful intarsia-work, some of which was designed by Lotto. A "Pantheon of great men," it enshrines among them two idols of Bergamo, whose titles to eminence are as distinct as the ages in which they lived, — the composer, Donizetti, of the nineteenth century; and that wise general, commemorated in Venice by Verrocchio's statue, Bartolommeo Colleoni, who, dying in 1475, was buried here in his own private chapel.

In the right aisle of the church stands Donizetti's elaborate tomb. Not content with that, the pious citizens have indulged local pride by doubly and trebly insisting upon his renown. Inevitably, the new theatre of the lower city became the Teatro Donizetti; the square beside it they named for him, likewise; and in the square they reared a monument, exhibiting their composer in the throes of inspiration. Seated on a Greek exedra, he summons the Muse, who, lyre in hand, advances toward him. The figures, though of heroic size, are realistically treated; and the whole composition is discordant, unrestful as the life around it. One look induces a disposition to fly from it into the neighboring square of the Fiera, — a quiet precinct of green alleys, statue-free, and quaint booths where the annual fair is held. Thereafter, it becomes easy to avoid altogether the pretentious monstrosity, which would imperil the fame of a greater man than Donizetti. The awful ineptitudes of modern Italian art do but defeat themselves.

With the great commander, Colleoni, happily it fared otherwise. His chapel, by the Lombard sculptor, Amadeo, ornamented with reliefs and statuettes in intricate profusion, holds an honorable place among the glories of the Renaissance. Five marble heroes watch over his tomb, which is surmounted by a portrait-statue. Beside him lies his daughter, Medea, in a tomb even more beautiful than his own, supporting a girl's recumbent figure, simply draped, with attendant mourning angels. The superb details of this sanctuary are subordinated to the general effect, which, as befits the hero, that "pattern of every Christian and knightly virtue," is one of serene repose. Fortunate in his death, as in his life, he belonged to a time when public memorials were not matters to be feared.

Some years before the end of his green old age, Colleoni made over his town-house to charitable uses. It is still standing, devoted to the orphanage which he founded there, a stone's throw from his tomb. He lived and died at his castle of Malpaga, far out on the flat plain, an hour's drive from the city. The fact that he bought and remodelled an ancient stronghold, to which he had taken a fancy, explains his choice of site, otherwise incomprehensible, since all the hills were at his command. The road to Malpaga must always have been a dull one, and now modern manufacturing suburbs hedge it in for the greater part of the way, till it turns at last into a green, country lane, overtopped by the castle-tower.

The red-brick, moated fortress with vine-encumbered walls stands alone in a sunny field. Low out-buildings, where once the retainers lodged, are now neglected; but the castle, itself, remains in excellent condition. Patiently and proudly its amiable guardian lowers the old drawbridge to display the faded splendors within. There is a central, arcaded court, stately and solemn, emblazoned in every arch with armorial bearings and cabalistic symbols. Some of the decorations date from Colleoni's time. The important ones, however, are due to his grandson, who, a few years later, employed the Brescian painter, Romanino, to illustrate ancestral triumphs, then fresh in every mind. The wall-spaces of the court were filled with vivid reproductions in color of the former master's victories. Here the frescoes, so long exposed to wind and weather, are much defaced; and no attempt has been made to restore them.

In the banquet-hall, which opens from the court, the frescoes, also by Romanino, are uninjured. They line the walls with scenes of Colleoni's hospitality during a festival in honor of the King of Denmark, who paid a visit to the castle. Here, he welcomes the royal guest and all his retinue; here, they are engaged in hunting; here, a tournament is held before the King; Colleoni, in the next, distributes prizes to the victors; there is a banquet, with the whole company gathered about him at the table, in rich apparel; finally, the King takes leave, and rides away, escorted by his host. The brilliant series is valuable, not only in a decorative sense, but also for its strong historic interest. Only these suggestions of his splendid liberality are left; since the hall is empty, like the apartments overhead, in one of which, the dark alcove of a chamber, lighted from an airy loggia, Colleoni died. Yet the castle, descending to our own time, through generations of his family, has escaped and still escapes modern improvement; for the present owner, who acquired the property by purchase, holds it intact, like an heirloom. The attendant, confronted at every turn with the founder's likeness, murmurs his name reverently in the denuded halls and corridors; and the good commander keeps his state there still, a living presence that has outlasted all the centuries.

One breathless Sunday afternoon the mountains seemed calling us imperatively to come up from the scorching plain. We asked nothing better; but the mountains were many; many ways led into them; and of their comparative merits we knew little. We begged, therefore, advice from our landlord, who, taking immediate interest in the matter, urged us to try the valley of the Serio. There was good lodging at Ponte della Selva; but if that were not high enough, we could go on farther up the valley to a new inn which he strongly recommended.

A train of the steam-tramway left in half an hour, and, flinging ourselves hastily into light travelling order, we caught it. A very stuffy, crowded train it was, crawling painfully between long intervals of pause at dusty villages darkened by factory walls; but it crawled always upward; and the mill-hands, on the way home from their holiday, gradually alighting, left us more at ease. A breeze sprang up, too, as we crept on along the river-bank, with the brimming torrent almost at our wheels. An hour and a half of this slow progress brought us to Ponte della Selva, the terminus of the line. It was a busy little place, bare and treeless. A high bridge, spanning the river, led to the hotel, conspicuously asserting itself on the opposite shore in the full glare of the sun. Half a look at it was enough. We must take the alternative course, and try the new inn, higher up, at Ardesio. Plainly, no one expected that we should stay here; for a row of vehicles stood just outside the station, and the drivers at once surrounded us, clamoring for custom. We accepted the reasonable terms of a gaunt, brown-bearded native, who looked like a reformed brigand; wondering, when we saw his equipment, how long it would hold together; but he sprang to the box confidently; and, overcoming distrust with the thought that Ardesio could not be far off, we rattled toward it behind him, at breakneck speed.

The moment that we left the village, we thought only of the scene around us. The road went on beside the whirling rapids of the Serio, which resembled a glacial stream in Switzerland, deep and full, with clouded waters of a wondrous indeterminate color, now blue, now green, then a blending of the two. Before us rose a range of mountain-slopes, under rocky peaks, pyramidal in form. Their lower gorges opened east and west of us, but we drove due north, toward a distant summit that overtopped them all. The villages, infrequent now, were no longer of a commercial cast. Our driver, half-turning in his seat, discoursed of them in a mixture of Italian and the mountain-patois, uncouth like himself. On the outskirts of one small settlement, the whole population seemed to have assembled in a meadow by the river-side. They wore holiday attire, but were strangely silent. A little apart, one tall man lay stretched out, face downward, on the grass. We had a momentary impression of the scene as we passed, and wondered what it meant.

"He must have fallen in a fit," we suggested.

"Or he is drunk, perhaps," the driver returned shrewdly. "Who knows?"

A mile farther on we met three men, coming down the road at a rapid gait. They stopped us to ask questions in the inscrutable dialect, — then hurried by.

We asked what had happened.

"The man is drowned," explained the driver. "How he got into the river I do not know, but it was the end of him. Look at it! And yet they try to bathe there. They go in over-heated, catch the cramp, and are drawn under. Every year it happens; the water is so cold."

Our minds slipped back, as we advanced, to that grave company, gayly dressed, speechless before the prostrate figure. Glancing in the sunshine, the Serio swept down toward it with a new significance, henceforth ineffaceable. The water was a thing of beauty; but it was deadly, too.

An exclamation from our guiding-spirit broke the silence that had settled upon us all.

"Ardesio!" he called to us, pointing up the valley, which had broadened unexpectedly in the last few moments. We saw overhead, in the middle distance, upon a smooth, green plateau high above the river, the towers of a town. Islanded on what seemed an artificial hillock, it loomed up in the mountain wilderness, like some fortified outpost of civilization; and above it, as we looked, against the dark forest-background, we caught a flutter of the Italian colors.

"That is the place," the man continued; "the flag flies at the inn."

Our course of half an hour had been a gradual ascent from Ponte della Selva. Now the way grew steeper; but it was very short; fifteen minutes later, we crossed the Serio, and climbed to the outer edge of the plateau. A wide meadow, sloping gently to the river-shore, stretched northward toward a fine old bridge beyond the town. This was the Ponte di Brialto, a landmark of the valley, as we soon discovered. Close beside us, on a terrace jutting out over the field, stood a low, cloistered church, curiously suggesting a casino of the *cinque cento* period, rather than a sanctuary. Passing this by, we entered the town-limits. Under chiming bell-towers, by church-doors, through narrow, busy streets where rudely decorated house-fronts illustrated saintly lives, we drove up to an open square on the northern side. A bridge curved away from it over a branch of the Serio, that foamed downward through a rocky gorge. On its brink was a covered fountain,—the town rendezvous and watering-place. Chattering gossips were collected there, scrubbing their copper kettles, or drying them in the sun. Close beside it, we turned abruptly, through an iron *grille*, into the courtyard of the inn.

The landlord met us with profuse apologies. He had not a single room to place at our disposal. He was grieved, desolated, in fact; but what would we have? Sunday was a festal day, and the house was more than full already.

We looked forth upon his earthly paradise in desperation. To enter in at its gate only to be cast out again was a cruel counterstroke of fortune. Must we drive back, then, to the arid crudities of Ponte della Selva? How could that be borne?

The host's next remark cancelled all discouragement. We were to stay with him, of course. To-morrow, there would be room, in plenty. Meanwhile, to-night, he would lodge us somewhere in the town, if we did not mind. Dinner was ready on the upper terrace. Would it please us to alight, and be served?

We minded not at all; moreover, our appetites were keen. He led us across the courtyard to an open gallery, set with small tables, brightened by flowers and wine-flasks. The meal had just begun. We chose a table next the railing, seated ourselves at it, and looked out.

We were at the intersection of four upland valleys, extending north, south, east, and west. To the south, below the town-roofs, ran the road of our approach from Bergamo. The eastern valley, higher than the others, was thickly wooded. That on the west ended in a vast Alpine arena, aglow with the setting sun. Northward, beyond the Brialto bridge, we looked far up the river to the still distant peak of Mount Redorta, towering above the rest. Twenty feet down, in our immediate foreground, the tributary streamlet plunged amid rocks and underbrush to join the Serio. There, at the lower level, on a supplementary terrace, built out to the water's edge, several of the townsmen were playing at bowls.

The tables around us filled up with a merry company of resident strangers. All had a confident air of possession, which, as interlopers, we regarded enviously; but the incomparable prospect and a course or two of the dinner soon set us right. Then came the host again with reassuring words.

"I have secured lodging," he said, "which, I hope, will content you. The Syndic of the commune has offered to take you in."

We made our content manifest. Thus far, he had spoken in Italian. Now, suddenly, he changed his ground.

"I am very glad," he remarked easily, in our own tongue. "My house has been open for two months; but you are the first English-speaking people to come my way."

We explained that, though of Anglo-Saxon race, we were Americans.

"So much the better!" he continued, laughing. "I lived long in New York. I know the Café Martin, Delmonico's, the Waldorf. Shall I make you a Manhattan cocktail?"

The everlasting hills melted away in the twilight that had stolen round us as we talked. Instead, we saw a hideous phantasm of sky-scrapers and trolley-cars, conjured up by his unexpected word. A familiar click followed it; and electric lights flashed everywhere: on the terrace, in the house, over the courtyard.

Cocktails and arc-lights! This was anything but civilization's outpost. Then we heard the rush of water; the broad mountain-barrier, the uninvaded empire of the night, refreshed our dazzled eyes. We were here, not there, after all. Here was Ardesio; and in the cool shadows of the lower terrace its unfamiliar shapes finished their game of bowls.

The Syndic's house was not lighted by electricity. It stood in the centre of the town; and we were conducted thither in the dark, up tortuous ways; entering, finally, a walled court through gates that closed heavily behind us, as they might have done in feudal ages. In a dim, upper corridor, an elderly woman, whom we assumed to be our hostess, came forward with a word of welcome. She was attended by a man-servant, who led us to a remote chamber, very large and low. Its principal windows opened upon the court. It had several doors, none of which would lock; each, in turn, during the night, was tried from without, partially opened, and hastily closed again with muffled apologies. Occasionally, we caught the sound of youthful voices. Otherwise our night was undisturbed and entirely comfortable. We left early in the morning to be installed at the inn, without meeting the Syndic, whom we never saw, to our knowledge. Later, when we heard that he was the happy father of eleven children, we understood better the nocturnal assaults of his household, so often attempted and so promptly suppressed.

Our stay at Ardesio was too short. Many of its best excursions could not be attempted; but the weather was of the fairest; the days were long; and we lived wholly in the open air. Thus we came to know familiarly the town itself, as well as the immediate neighborhood. We strolled through the flowering meadows of the eastern valley, by old water-mills, to a cavern on the height through which the stream tore its way in a boisterous cascade. The cyclamen grew wild upon the hills; and by narrow paths the charcoal-burners staggered down under their loads, in single file, bringing full sacks to market. We rested in the shade, to look back at Ardesio's towers far below us, and hear the faint chiming of their bells. Then we went on higher yet, through a dark hamlet, where all the streets were stairs, to the divide overhead, beyond which other and wilder valleys led, by footpaths only, to the sequestered town of Ave.

Up the Serio's western branch the footpaths ran at a high level along walls of cliff toward the mountain-amphitheatre. Time failed, unhappily, for the pursuit of all their stirring possibilities. The mountains, softly outlined and regular in form, were unlike any others known to us; yet, from the first, we seemed to know them well. In one of our walks the paradox suddenly grew tenable. These were the mountains of certain old English prints and water-colors, dear to a former generation, — indelible imprints of our early childhood, dating from days gone by, when this whole region was the fashionable haunt of English travellers. Railways changed all that, long since; where they are not, primeval solitude is undisturbed.

The Serio, itself, we followed up at the shore level for a few delightful miles; as far as Gromo, a high-pitched town, still unspoiled within, but, without, much injured now by the central electric plant, which disseminates light through the valley. In this and other walks, the peasants whom we met often made advances, — friendly, yet perplexing also; for they stopped to entertain us with lively discourse in dialect, of which every word was incomprehensible. We could but acknowledge the good-will, thus implied, by helpless gesticulation, and pass on under a cloud of embarrassment. Going or coming, we always lingered on the Ponte di Brialto. There the whirling current was at its fiercest, and just above the eastern arch a row of antiquated mill-flumes shot into it showers of foam. From this central point the outlook comprehended all four valleys, Ardesio on its green height, the river coursing round it with ever-varying color and that relentless force of which we had been given fearful proof. The bridge was haunted by the gnome-like figure of a man, who shuffled back and forth there, bent low under a heavy burden. Unlike the rest, he never spoke, never made an amicable sign, but regarded us, as he passed, savagely, with piercing eyes. We saw him first at dusk; gray, ugly, deformed, a most uncanny creature in the dim light, he looked like the evil spirit of the stream. Even the village innocent, who hovered persistently about the fountain, seemed less of a lost soul than he.

Our acquaintance at the inn was of a cheerier kind. We met there a native of the valley, who had been a traveller in his time and knew many lands; yet all the truer to his own corner of earth, he returned to it annually, and had much to tell us of what lay just out of sight, beyond our range. Ever luring us onward, he enmeshed us in a network of enticing schemes which could only be woven into "such stuff as dreams are made on;" for already we were turning back. We parted with mutual pledges to join forces in another year and explore the mountains thoroughly together. He and his family remained a little longer at Ardesio; while we, chartering a carriage, completed our short circuit of the hills to Iseo and Bergamo.

We started at five in the afternoon on the Feast of the Assumption, which had been celebrated all day long by much ringing of bells, and by a primitive fair, held in the open piazza above the Brialto bridge. The whole neighborhood had trooped into Ardesio to attend the feast. All wore their best clothes, and brought their luncheons with them; picnicking in odd corners, when meal-time came, over the watermelon, of which their last course seemed invariably to consist. The streets were still crowded, when, thus leaving Ardesio at its gayest, we drove south and east by way of Clusone, — a compact hill-town, with a mammoth church built high above the roofs on a stone platform, around which huge marble saints keep guard.

We halted long enough to climb up among their pedestals, to see the church-interior, and overlook from its airy terrace the land that lay before us. Then we drove down into a strange valley, dotted with isolated hillocks, rising a hundred feet from the level plain like barrows of some extinct, giant race; and, out of it, into the ravine of Borlezza, leading on toward Lovere, through a bleak landscape made doubly dreary by lowering skies. Thunder growled in them, and we sped on, hoping to escape the storm; but long before we gained shelter, it burst upon us; we entered Lovere in a deluge, attended by many a lightning-flash and furious cannonade. Night had come on; one moment the Lake of Iseo, brilliantly illumined, opened before us like a raging sea; the next, we were in Stygian darkness. At about eight we turned into the court of an inn, finding there good quarters in which to dine, "and sleep in spite of thunder." The tempest spent itself out in the night, before a calm, bright morning.

Lovere, at the northern end of the lake, is "the place the most beautifully romantic I ever saw in my life" of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's description; a town, as she says, "near two miles long and the figure of a semi-circle,—a mixture of shops and palaces, gardens and houses, which ascend a mile high, in a confusion which is not disagreeable." While "the lake itself is different from any other I ever saw or read of, being the colour of the sea, rather deeper tinged with green." All these characteristics remain practically unchanged, after the hundred and fifty years that have elapsed since she thus set them down. A railway, to be sure, has crept up along the quay; but it is a very sluggish, inoffensive railway of infrequent trains and light traffic. The same primitive ferry-boat, which Lady Mary looked out upon, plies under its striped canopy across the sea-green water to the farther shore. The semi-circular figure is preserved intact, with its odd mixture of towers and palace-fronts, curving streets, gardens, gray walls, and hillside squares, all steeped in quietude. We explored them through that pleasant, summer morning; then, after the noon meal, we took the steamer for the lower end of the lake.

The voyage was an affair of three hours, during which we touched at many villages on either hand, and at the central island. The Lake of Iseo, once high in favor, is now out of fashion, seldom visited by the foreigner, — a happy circumstance that heightens its peculiar charm. Only fifteen miles long, scarcely three miles broad at the widest point, and shut in by lofty mountains, it is one of the smallest as well as one of the loveliest among the Italian lakes; but the agreeable disregard into which it has fallen of late years will soon be at an end; for a new railway from Brescia into the Val Camonica is already in process of construction, piercing the lake's rocky eastern shore with a series of tunnels that must inevitably open it up again to the world's notice. On this day, except for our intrusion, the travel was purely local.

The small communes stand sometimes at the water's edge, sometimes high above it. Tavernola, midway on the western shore, was the most noted of them; but a year or two ago, a landslide descended upon it; and now its walls and terraces overhang the water, half shattered and deserted.

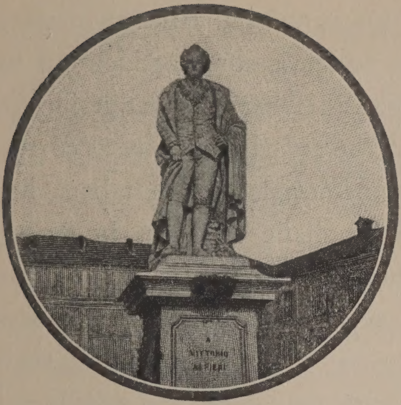
On board, we fell in with a Brescian art-collector, who grew friendly and voluble when he found that we knew something of his native city. One of his chief interests was in the work of Vincenzo Foppa, the fifteenth-century Lombard painter, who, as he declared, has never yet received half the just meed of critical appreciation. Foppa's masterpiece, a beautiful Adoration of the Kings, hangs in the National Gallery; one comes upon him at Milan, Bergamo, and other North Italian cities. Authentic examples, however, are rare in both senses, and his name is unfamiliar to "the general." He awaits his fortunate hour, to be monographed into fame, the world over; and when it comes, our chance acquaintance will bring much fine discrimination to the front. He left us at Iseo, with good wishes, begging us, as he went, to look him up in

Brescia and study the neglected master under his guidance.

We had meant to dine in Sarnico, at the southern extremity of the lake; but fate and the steamer-captain willed otherwise. The benevolent officer, who knew that we were booked for Bergamo, strongly urged us to take the steam-tram which was just about to start; and he whisked our luggage into it before we had time to make a protest. In another moment we went gliding out of Sarnico into the open country. We blessed him for his forethought afterwards; for, had we waited in accordance with our plan, we must have taken the interesting journey of two hours entirely in the dark; whereas, the land now looked its best all the way, in the favorable light of the late afternoon. A cool breeze refreshed us; and, through it, we brushed by gardens, fields, and vineyards, in and out of parti-colored hamlets, stopping at villa gates and farm-house doors. The neighbors gathered in merry groups to meet their returning friends. The whole life of the province seemed revealed to us at this mellow time of day; and no other conveyance would have brought us home to it thus closely and intimately.

In good time for dinner, we came into Bergamo, and made our way to the inn. The landlord, who had himself devised our expedition, was enchanted at the success of it. He actually listened, when we talked; and all his cheery satellites welcomed us like old friends.

The Centenary of Alfieri at Asti



The Centenary of Alfieri at Asti

ITALY holds her poets in grateful remembrance. And since by tradition her poets are active patriots as well, they leave behind them a double claim upon her memory which is always nobly recognized. Not only in her Valhalla of Santa Croce, at Florence, has she recorded their woes and their triumphs in splendid monuments of marble; but also in the lesser provincial cities their statues are set up, to mark some accident of birth or fortune. Wherever their wandering feet once strayed, the association is revived to-day in lasting memorials. The Italians have the gift of emphatic terseness in inscriptions. And the foreign traveller, coming unexpectedly upon one of these in some grass-grown square or empty street, reads the sculptured words with reverence, and recalls anew the long, patient struggle which led to the conquest of Italian liberty.

It was inevitable that the close of the first century following the death of Vittorio Alfieri,—one of the "four minds, which, like the elements, might furnish forth creation,"—whom Mazzini called the first modern Italian, should be marked by some fitting ceremonial; and the city of his birth, Asti, in Piedmont, naturally claimed the right to its observance. The date fixed was the hundredth anniversary of his death, October 8, 1903. For months preceding it the authorities spared no pains of preparation for their festivity.

Asti, a prosperous community of forty thousand inhabitants, flourishing amid its famous wine-growing district, stands picturesquely in the wide valley of the Tanaro, encircled by vine-clad hills. The ancient Asta, it was once a fortified stronghold; and though it has outgrown the old walls, portions of them remain, as well as some of the gates, which with many sturdy towers of fine proportion — the ornaments and landmarks of its intricate thoroughfares — give the city a mediæval look, remote and distinctive. It is, however, to-day, alert, thriving; a garrison town still, with fluttering *bersaglieri*, who march briskly from barracks and parade to a very lively bugle quickstep; and its later distinction, born with Alfieri, has never been allowed to slumber. The long, busy Corso, winding from the Turin to the Alessandria gate, bears the poet's name; so does the vast, central, heart-shaped Piazza, midway in which stands his marble statue. The well-built theatre is, of course, the Teatro Alfieri. On the market-place near by, the stir of small trade seems coupled with intelligent interest in literature. Good books are displayed in the shop-windows. Everywhere, too, are signs of enlightened public spirit. There are no beggars in the streets; the poor are well considered; the schools and hospitals are modern buildings of good architectural effect; and, finally, the leading citizens manifest an open-handed munificence, broadly emulative, not only ready, but likewise eager, for prompt action in time of need.

To one such citizen, Count Leonetto Ottolenghi, is due the external renovation of Alfieri's birthplace, a handsome eighteenth-century palace at a turn of the Corso, above mentioned. The poet's parents, as he writes in the opening sentence of his autobiography, were noble, upright, and well-to-do. Their stately apartments, carefully tended, have been kept intact, with all mural decorations, pictures, mirrors, furniture, even to that of the chamber where the son, Vittorio, was born, anno 1749, as recorded on a marble tablet in the wall above the bed. Nothing is changed within. But without, one end of the palace was formerly encumbered with unimportant, shabby buildings that now are swept away to make room for the beautiful little Piazza Umberto I, which an old sycamore tree overshadows; and there, during the last six months, the house was given a new façade, conforming to the old one. The scheme, thoughtfully planned, is justified by the results, all in admirable taste. On the Piazza side have been inserted two inscriptions supplementing an older record upon the Corso. One of these is a remarkable quotation from Alfieri's ninety-second sonnet, written near the close of his life, wherein he predicts the gratitude of future generations. Convinced that this was sure to come, he expressed the conviction frankly. Already, he declares, "I hear them say: —

"'O Vate nostro in pravi
Secoli nato, eppur create hai queste
Sublimi età che profetando andavi.'"[1]

The implication of sublimity for the present moment in the choice of these ringing lines would be somewhat startling, perhaps, were it not that the entire sonnet, well known to Alfieri's countrymen, deals with the regeneration of Italy, then but a forlorn hope, now fortunately realized. The second inscription, unveiled during the festal week, proclaims that these prophetic words of the poet are gratefully reiterated by a free, united people, one hundred years after his death. With this illuminating commentary, the unusual tribute seems felicitous and just.

The date of the festival happily coincided this year with that of Asti's movable autumnal feast, the vintage. Grapes and foaming must are her chief commercial resources;

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[1] Or, roughly translated into English blank verse: —

O bard of ours, in the days
Of darkness born, thou didst indeed create
This age sublime that well thy verse foretold!

as the crop goes, so goes Asti, according to a local by-word; and since the latest crop, though of meagre quantity, proved excellent in quality, cheerfulness prevailed. The harvesting was in progress when the memorable week of cloudless skies began; and those who followed its details for the first time found them an unfailing source of pleasure. Daily, from dawn to dusk, a continuous procession of white oxen, bulls, or cows, yoked in pairs, circled round the great square, dragging loads of purple grapes along the Corso and its tributaries to every courtyard in the town.

The carts, of uniform construction, resemble huge sarcophagi, and the load is heavy. A high wooden yoke, strapped to the horns of the animals, aids them in its draught. They are patient, gentle, slow, and need no urging; but fix watchful eyes a few paces in advance upon the boy who guides them, generally by signs alone. When the load is hauled, they are unyoked to chew the cud in a corner of the court; while a peasant, bare-footed and bare-legged, climbs into the cart to begin the laborious treading process, working his way down through the heap and occasionally refreshing himself with one of its topmost bunches as he goes. Soon his legs and feet are stained crimson by the juice, which pours out from the bottom of the cart through a wooden pipe into a tub placed to receive it. When the pipe runs dry, the crushed mass within is removed for further extraction in a wine-press; and it is commonly subjected to a third pressure for the thin wine of the contadini, called *vinello.*

That is the primitive labor, which, during the first week of October, goes on in Asti's courts, making a series of *genre* pictures, irresistible to the stranger within her gates. The sunlight streams over red-tiled roofs and vine-covered walls upon the merry, trampling servitor and his attendants, upon the mild-eyed oxen and the bubbling wine-vat. All is cheer, friendliness, and courtesy. He who stops to look is urged to stay, to try the fresh grapes or a glass of last year's wine; even to visit the cellar and the household. If the stranger is an American, it will be assumed that Spanish is his native language; for the North American is so rare a bird, that no one can remember when he last checked his hurried flight at Asti.

With this animated background of exceptional interest and beauty, the Alfieri feast was introduced, three days before its time, by another important ceremony, viz.: the unveiling of an equestrian statue of the late King Umberto,—the first put up in Italy,—in the new square which perpetuates his name. The bronze group, heroic in size, is a spirited work of the Piedmontese sculptor, Tabacchi; facing it was a royal pavilion of crimson and gold, where in full general's uniform stood the Duke of Aosta, nephew of Umberto and first cousin to the present king; surrounding him were the city dignitaries, the Syndic of Asti, Commendatore Bocca, the sculptor, and other distinguished guests. Two smaller pavilions, crowded with ladies gayly dressed, flanked the statue. The Italian colors flickered everywhere in the morning sunshine; and at the appointed hour troops of military and civic societies, bearing wreaths and banners, filed into the square to group themselves in order about the pedestal. After presentations and addresses, happily short, the veil was withdrawn, the band struck up the royal march, the Duke, attended, moved slowly round the statue, inspecting it on all sides, stopping now and then for a word with some veteran standard-bearer, then drove off to breakfast down the decorated Corso. The populace retired for a time; but all that day and evening the contadini thronged in from the hills; until, after sunset, when the general illumination of the city began, the square and its adjacent streets became almost impassable, yet with no sign of disorder. The crowd, which included many women and small children, was well behaved, reverent, even, in its expression of patriotic enthusiasm.

For three days more the vintage proceeded without interruption. Then, on the morning of the 8th, the birthplace was thrown open to visitors. The ground floor of the palace contains a small museum, and a library with some of the poet's manuscripts; but the true goal of pilgrimage lies in the series of rooms above, running the whole length of the *piano nobile*, especially in the chamber where Alfieri first saw the light. There hangs the portrait, painted for his sister, in 1798, by his friend, Saverio Fabre. This picture, in fine condition, is a three-quarters length of the poet's figure, seated, with a red cloak draped about him and a beautiful intaglio set in a ring upon his hand. The pose is unconstrained, the expression thoughtful, dignified, sympathetic. More than any other existing likeness it presents the lofty ambition and intellectual power of the man,—that, too, most vividly and attractively. So one would have him look, so one feels that he must have looked in the serenity of his later years. It is a genuine work of art, singularly refined and pleasing, from the hand of a painter otherwise little known. Alfieri's original letter to his sister, which accompanied the picture, is framed upon the wall beside it; and on the back of the canvas he wrote his translation of two lines from Pindar, expressing life's evanescence, since man at his best is but a shadow and a dream.

Aside from these rooms, the traces of Alfieri at Asti are few and far between. That is easily explained by the fact that he left his native city when he was only nine years old, — as it happened, never to return. The early chapters of the autobiography deal with his childhood there, its mishaps, its small failings, its punishments; dwelling upon one of the last, which consisted in forcing him to wear his nightcap to church, — once to the small, unfrequented Carmine near his home, and again to the larger church of San Martino in the heart of the town.

The penalty seems by no means harsh, yet it so distressed him that it was never again repeated. These two churches still remain, probably much as they were in Alfieri's time. There is also a sunny house with a walled garden, to which his mother removed after his father's death, — a house which the boy must have known. Certain of the surrounding streets undoubtedly retain the aspect familiar to him. Otherwise, the Mecca of the birthplace and its Kaaba, the birth-chamber, stand alone.

On the evening of the 8th the city was again illuminated; this time, in Alfieri's honor. Slender, graceful arches spanned the Corso at short intervals. These, adorned with the city arms, wreathed with pine, laurel, and clusters of palm-leaves, were so treated as to be decorative even by day. By night, aglow with thousands of tiny lamps in red, white, and green, the national colors, — some following the lines of the arch, others hanging from it in full, grape-like clusters, — they produced an effect which was the triumph of good taste in the employment of simple means. The public buildings and private palaces blazed with light and color. Long festoons of lamps gleamed in the great Piazza, where the usual gas-jets were embellished with ornamental burners, and the statue stood out against a fiery arch, grander than all the rest, inscribed with the titles of the poet's tragedies. The view, either from the crowded pavement or from some upper window commanding square and Corso, was a wonder of fantastic gayety. Yet, in its way, nothing could have been less elaborate. Candles and colored glass, that was all! but all was so well disposed as to give a definite impression of artistic skill, with no sense of overdoing.

That night the key-note of the commemoration was struck in the performance of "Saul" at the Teatro Alfieri. This tragedy is conceded to be the poet's master-work, — his battle-charger, as the Italians say; and the conditions of its recital were wholly favorable. The theatre is airy and well arranged; graceful in its lines, of imposing size, yet not too large for comfort. Its five tiers were filled not only with the flower of Asti, but with visitors of note from all parts of Italy. Every tier bore a row of medallions descriptive of Alfieri's work. The curtain, by some local scene-painter, represented his apotheosis, with Fame blowing her trumpet before him, and his tragic heroes and heroines grouped below in appropriate attitudes.

Like most of Alfieri's plays, "Saul" holds strictly to the "unities," and has but one scene for its five acts: the camp of the Israelites at Gilboa on the last day of the king's life. The cast was a strong one. There are only six parts, three of these being comparatively unimportant; but all were well played. The Saul was Salvini; the David, his oldest son, Gustavo, — an actor of long experience and the best possible training, — who has become a favorite with the Italian public, and is now famous at home and abroad.

Saul does not appear in the first act, of which David is the dominant figure. It was seen at once that the son, apart from professional facility, has inherited many of the father's natural gifts. He is tall, handsome, graceful; with a strong, full voice, perfectly controlled. The act, purely introductory, makes few emotional demands; but the part is a new one to him, and its unfolding aroused keen interest. At the close, he was heartily recalled.

With Saul's entrance at the opening of the second act the strong scenes of the play begin, and thenceforward the interest advances in dramatic crescendo. The old king, haunted by dreams of his approaching fate, passes swiftly from gentle melancholy to black despair, which is relieved by gleams of tenderness and hope's most flattering illusions. In one moment he is proud of his valorous son-in-law, David, the people's champion, and submits the conduct of the battle to his hands. In the next, he finds treachery in his nearest and dearest, in every friend an enemy; and, jealous of David's prowess, turns upon him with blind, doting fury, — only to recall him to his arms. He bids David play upon his harp, to stir him with a war-song, to soothe him with a song of peace. Then, at a word, his fitful jealousy breaks forth once more, and he threatens the champion's life with drawn sword.

In the fourth act the lightning of Saul's rage is launched against the priesthood. He condemns the high-priest Achimelech, in the fiercest terms, to a lingering death, and orders a general massacre of the people. Then his mind, giving way, is darkened by dreadful visions of the wrath to come. The victorious Philistine trumpet renews his present woes and restores his reason; but his sons are slain; he dismisses his daughter and her attendants to a place of safety; and in the final moment, left alone, he falls upon his sword as the conquering host swarms into the camp, where Saul lies dead upon the field, — to the last, royal.

It need hardly be said that Salvini finds in this varied conflict of the passions a part worthy of his genius, whereof all the exacting requirements seem amply fulfilled. In his crimson and gold garments, with crown, mantle, and jewelled girdle, his is a superb presence, kingly, oriental, barbaric; vigorous, yet restrained, through all its shifting phases, and always intensely human. The range of his unequalled voice was never more apparent. In a word, the part, as he plays it, can be compared only with his own Shakespearean impersonations, — the Lear, the Macbeth, the Othello. It has long held its own with these in Italy. If its appeal to a cosmopolitan public is less direct, that is only because he has Alfieri behind him in it, and not Shakespeare.

In his autobiography Alfieri described Saul as his favorite character, comprising every conceivable emotion; but complained that he had never seen it properly interpreted. During his Florentine life, occasionally he played the part himself, at his own house, before select audiences, in dilettante fashion; and, painfully aware of his shortcomings, regretted that he was not an actor, since none then living could do it justice. The Saul of Asti, with all Italy in attendance, brought home, literally, the contrast between his day and ours; and it also brought to mind some lines of a later poet, Calamati, which may be aptly quoted here, even in a halting English paraphrase. They were addressed to the writer's brother, from Marseilles, in 1886.

"Torquato, all in vain your love demands
A labored tribute, at an exile's hands,
To him whose gentle presence oversways
The prostrate soul, and stills the note of praise.
Salvini! Glory of the art that blends
All arts in one, and makes all nations friends!
Nor lips, nor hand, nor trembling pen of mine

Shall speak for him whose speech is half divine;
Demand for that a more than mortal strain;
Bring Alfieri back to life again!"

Throughout the trying scenes of the second and third acts, Salvini the father was ably seconded by the son as the mystical David, of whom Saul bitterly inquires why he so often affronts his king with the name of God. The part, though sympathetic, presents formidable dangers of exaggeration on the heroic side, on the sentimental one of mawkishness; between which Scylla and Charybdis the younger Salvini held his course with unerring skill. The righteous indignation of his appeal for justice was manly and impressive, without a trace of rant; and the long, difficult passage of the songs, recited, as ordered by Alfieri, to a harp accompaniment, was splendidly sustained. A modern spirit of realism, idealized and governed by fine traditions of the past, warranted his national fame as the leading tragic actor of his day and generation. After the third act, his place, before the curtain and behind it, was at his father's side.

On the following morning a dramatic convention met in a small hall of the old Municipal Palace. All persons interested were asked to attend it without formality, and the room was well filled by a representative company of authors, actors, and officers of various literary societies. The elder Salvini was chosen president by acclamation. He opened the convention with a paper on a proposed popular theatre, to consist of four companies qualified to perform the masterpieces of dramatic literature, new and old, in the larger Italian cities, the theatre to receive a state subsidy, and to be directed by a competent commission; in its scope to be artistic and educational, with all performances at moderate prices. The paper ended in a consideration of the matter on its practical side. The ambitious project was loudly applauded, and speeches in favor of it were made by Count Angelo De Gubernatis, of Rome, and Professor Molineri, of Milan; the latter going so far as to suggest, then and there, a number of names for the commission. The suggestions, however, were not adopted, the convention contenting itself with a general approval.

All this had a sound pathetically familiar to American ears. We, too, long for a theatre conforming to canons of taste, from which all question of money-making shall be excluded, — have longed for it, indeed, these many years. We meet in a limited circle to applaud, discuss, and pass good resolutions; but the scheme, undeveloped, germ-like, is still in its earliest stages. A general approval of the few is all that has been attained.

At the afternoon session the convention listened to interesting discourses on theatrical subjects from Professor Molineri and others. Then, after a complimentary telegram to the retired tragic actress, Ristori, it adjourned to a banquet, where the players of the night before were welcomed by the Syndic. This was followed, in the theatre, by the reading of "Sylla," an unfinished play of the late Pietro Cossa, whose "Nero" and other historical tragedies earned for him the title of the modern Alfieri. The reader, Cossa's friend, Angelo Pasetti, held his audience for two hours with this fragment; a notable feat, considering the Italian temperament, within walls that had last echoed the voice of Salvini. So closed the second day, an off-day comparatively, yet full of new interest to the looker-on in Asti.

The third day began with the unveiling, in the public garden, of a monument to a native philanthropist, Secondo Boschiero, which drew out a long procession of working men and women. Later, the Syndic received the delegates from Montpellier, in France, where are preserved certain of Alfieri's books, manuscripts, and other memorials. These passed by the poet's will to his friend, the painter Fabre, who transferred them in due course to Montpellier, his own native city. The collection is there treasured religiously. The delegates brought an album of photographic specimens from it and a complete catalogue to Asti; and Asti returned the compliment with a bronze medallion, cast in honor of the event; then feasted and toasted the French guests ceremoniously, escorting them afterward to the theatre, for the performance of "Filippo."

This early work, dealing with an episode in the life of Philip II of Spain, seems deficient in action, verbose, dry, and dull to the casual reader; but Alfieri wrote for the stage, not the closet; and the play gained so much in performance as to cause agreeable surprise. Some of its scenes moved with a swift intensity, suggesting the modern French drama of intrigue; and though the final act, with dagger and poison bowl both dragged to the front, became excessive in its gloom, the production as a whole proved extremely interesting. Unity of place was discarded in it for a series of rich interiors, which, neither tawdry nor overcrowded, were a lesson in scene-painting; and it was splendidly costumed. The cast had no great names; but the chief actor, De Sanctis, if not divinely gifted, is able and intelligent; heavily weighted with the part of Filippo, a strong study in jealous egotism, he bore his burden manfully; and the supporting players at least did not offend. The audience, clearly, could not forget "Saul;" yet, willing to give encouragement, it was well disposed and never bored, generous in its applause to the end.

The last day of the festival opened with a civic reception to the Minister of Public Instruction, Signor Nasi, who represented the Italian Government; and at half-past ten all invited guests assembled in the theatre for the commemorative oration of Tommaso Villa. The scene was brilliant. Celebrities and officials occupied the stage, where on one side stood a bust of Alfieri, crowned with laurel; on the other, the speaker's desk; and the auditorium was crowded to the doors. The Minister, Nasi, in an introductory address of welcome, declared that the honors to Alfieri were accorded not alone on literary and academic grounds, but had a deeper national significance, as demonstrated by the character of the audience. The presence of the delegates from Montpellier suggested a happy reference to the cordial relations between his own country and France, which, at the moment, was preparing to receive the Italian sovereigns. He then introduced the orator, whose discourse was a rapid survey of Alfieri's life, character, and work, simple and forcible in its delivery. He reviewed the plays in detail, not attempting to disguise their faults, but dwelling upon their political import, always foremost in the mind of Alfieri, who was an apostle of freedom. In this underlying motive he found the source of their strength and their defects.

The oration was appreciative, yet finely critical, — admirably human, as was said by one of the audience afterward. It stirred the assembly to an interest as genuine and unaffected as the discourse itself.

In the afternoon the Minister was received at the birthplace by Count Ottolenghi and the Syndic; and he proceeded thence to the formal opening of a new asylum for poor children, named in honor of Queen Margherita, the widow of Umberto. In his inaugural address he paid Asti well-merited compliments upon the conduct of her charities and her wisdom in providing amply for the education of the poor. Then came the customary banquet, at which the indefatigable Syndic presided. This time the invitations included all visiting strangers; and in the large hall of the Albergo Reale all the wines of Asti flowed continuously. There were speeches by the Syndic, the Minister; a salutation from Florence; a response from Montpellier. The proceedings closed with the sending of telegraphic messages to Ristori and the poet Carducci; after which, along the illuminated Corso, all hurried to the theatre for the last of the festal performances.

The play was "Orestes," with the younger Salvini in the title-part; Salvini the elder, as Pylades; and an actress of note, Giacinta Pezzana, especially engaged for Clytemnestra; the strongest cast, in short, which Italy could furnish.

The tragedy stands next to "Saul" among Alfieri's works in popular estimation. Oftener played than that, it is the better known of the two; yet there is a wide gap between them. In "Orestes" the author challenges comparison with the masterpieces of Greek tragedy, and the test is too severe. It is a play of fine passages, with a very effective last act, monotonous and slow of action in the earlier scenes; for the leading part, brilliant and heroic as it is, lacks the quick variety of "Saul." None the less, the performance must always be interesting in good hands, and at Asti it moved the audience profoundly.

Pylades, throughout, is a secondary figure, far too slight for Salvini. He made the most of his opportunities, yet these were so few as to keep him always in the background; but what a background! His speechless horror over Clytemnestra's death at the hand of Orestes had a world of expression in it; and the last line of the tragedy, —

> "Oh, hard
> Is cruel fate's inevitable law!"

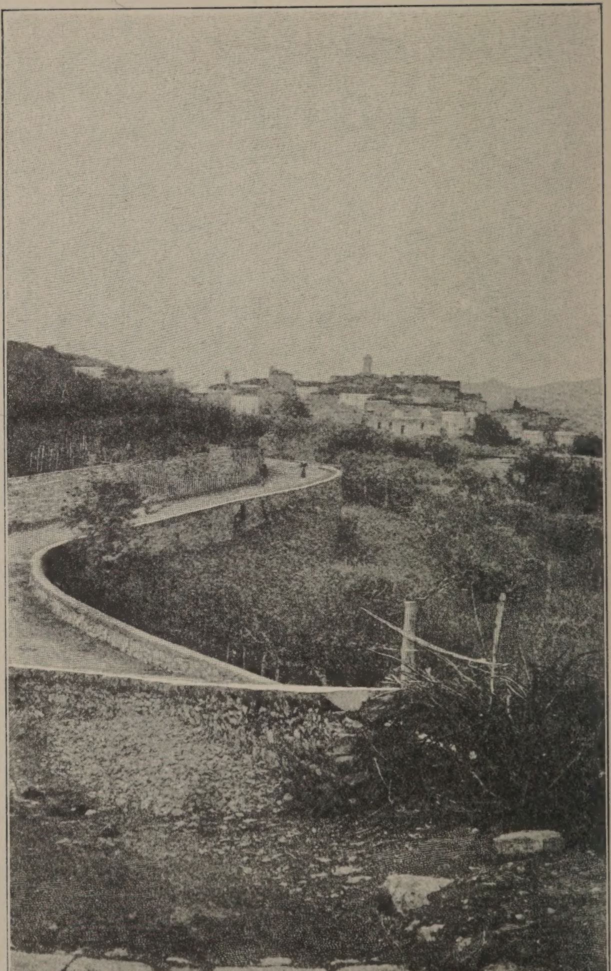
on his lips, was awful in its solemnity.

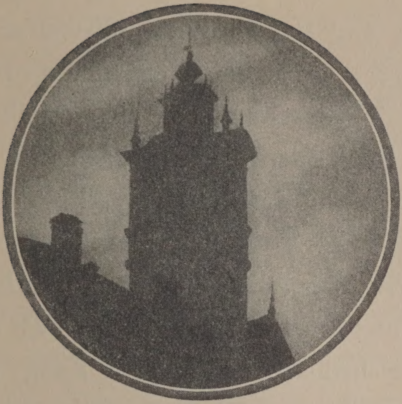
Gustavo Salvini found in Orestes a harder task than in David. If not infused with the highest imagination, it is still a most exacting part; its deficiencies are difficulties. More, therefore, was required, and more accomplished. In form and bearing the actor seemed an ideal presentment of the Greek hero. As the play advanced, the impression, made before, of his artistic resources, natural and acquired, was confirmed. In the final scene he surpassed himself. His agonized reiteration of "I, a parricide?" stirred the heart, and the accompanying look of terror, as if the Furies were already at his back, was a stroke of genius. No further proof of his rare gift is needed.

The city gave laurel wreaths to both players, who were recalled again and again. Then the great audience slowly dispersed, under the dying lamps of the last illumination. The festival of Asti was over; but vibrations from it spread throughout Italy in widening circles. At Turin, in the following week, "Saul" was played again at the Carignano Theatre; a bronze bust of Alfieri was unveiled on the theatre façade by the Duke of Aosta; there was a commemorative address by Panzacchi. At Florence, delegates from Asti decorated Alfieri's tomb, in Santa Croce, and the house where he died, on the Lungarno, with due ceremony. At Florence, too, occurred a final performance of "Saul," after an oration by Del Lungo. This proved also to be the final appearance upon the stage of the elder Salvini, who, without formal leave-taking, has lived since then in honorable retirement.

Alfieri, in a mournful mood, reminded Asti once that she had given him a cradle; and though a grave could not be hers to give, since fate had called him forth, he bade her take his lessons to her heart. She has done her best to obey him.

The Wraith of a Ducal City





The Wraith of a Ducal City

We were moved to visit it by a captivating article in an old number of "Cosmopolis," from the pen of that high authority, Charles Yriarte. At the moment of our embarkation for Italian shores, a friend sent us the magazine, suggesting that we should make acquaintance with the mysterious Sabbioneta,—for that was the name of the place; and the chronicle proved so interesting that we at once determined to follow it up. The accomplished historian's story was a long one, told in French with much minuteness of detail. Briefly, the main facts are these: —

Duke Vespasian Gonzaga, of the line that ruled so long in Mantua, was related to the brilliant Isabella d' Este, whom, however, he could have known only in his childhood. In 1551, a dozen years after Isabella's death, he came of age, and marrying his cousin, Donna Diana, established himself on his estate, twenty miles southwest of Mantua, where, later, his own city, Sabbioneta, sprang into being. He developed early into a lawless, ill-tempered tyrant, neglectful of his wife, who, unhappily, entered upon an intrigue with the Duke's secretary, one Raineri, as Vespasian soon discovered. He caused the secretary to be assassinated; then locked his wife into a chamber with her lover's body and a bottle of poison. After lingering there for two days, she killed herself.

The remembrance of these horrors was too much even for Vespasian, and he abandoned the scene of them, — but only for a time. In 1560 he returned to Sabbioneta, full of projects for constructing there a city, which should be a lesser Athens. The scheme was duly carried out by the foremost architect of the day, Bartolommeo Cattaneo, a follower of Bartolino di Novara, builder of the still existent fortress-castles in Mantua and Ferrara. At Vespasian's command, within a vast, moated fortification, Cattaneo laid out streets, squares, and pleasure-grounds, where palaces, theatres, churches, colonnades, and triumphal arches grew under his hand with amazing swiftness. As the work drew near its end, the country-folk were forced by ducal edict to forsake their homes and people the new, empty capital.

There Vespasian lived and reigned for years in great magnificence. Constituting himself a patron of the arts, he collected Greek and Roman marbles, and adorned the stately vistas, as well as his own prospective mausoleum, with the best sculpture of the time. His unwilling citizens lacked neither bread nor circuses; but to the last he remained a tyrant, feared and dreaded. His second wife did not live long; she bore him two children, a daughter and a son; the latter he kicked to death in a blind fit of rage. His third marriage fortunately proved childless. In 1590 he died, leaving no successor, and all the joyless mirth died with him. The people fled from the gilded prison-house which they had always hated, back into their own free air, rejoicing in release. Sabbioneta stood alone, magnificent, with empty courts and grass-grown streets, fortified against all but neglect and the treacherous enmity of time. Her glory had departed; and no man ever dreamed of reviving it.

Such is the substance of Yriarte's tale, which he embellished with many minor points of interest, historical and descriptive; but in all that concerns the present state of Sabbioneta, it is vague and shadowy — left so, perhaps, by design, the better to awaken curiosity. Our own, certainly, woke as we read it, stirring us to personal investigation. What trace, we wondered, could be found to-day of all Vespasian's arbitrary pomp, after three hundred years and more of abandonment? The only way to discover that was to go over the ground ourselves.

No sooner was the plan conceived, than all things seemed perversely inspired to prevent it. One delay led to another, and when, at last, we reached Mantua late in the season, the days were exasperatingly short, the autumn rains had begun. Moreover, the steam-tram upon which we counted had taken up its winter schedule, wherein no trains served us. Even if the sun were to shine, it could only be a bright spot in the sky, without warmth; and a drive of four hours in the rain is dreary to contemplate. There was much to see in Mantua, though we had seen it all before under better conditions. We postponed Sabbioneta again and again.

There came a finer morning, when we actually ordered the horses. They drew up at the door, and rain fell in torrents. We sent them away, dismissing all idea of the excursion for that day, at least. Then the sudden shower blew over; the clouds drifted apart and a large patch of blue sky appeared among them. It was still only nine o'clock; we redemanded our expansive "barouche-landau," which, if worst came to worst, could be made water-tight at a moment's notice. The stout white horses curveted and pranced, as we dashed down the Corso to the admiration of all beholding Mantuans. Immediately, our sign of promise was withdrawn. Before we reached the new park just outside the city-gate, the blue sky had vanished; and we saw it no more.

The autumn morning, as we drove out into it, grew unutterably dank and chill. The reedy fens that surround Mantua have a plaintive melancholy, depressing to the spirit, even when they gleam in summer sunshine. The waters, enlivened by no sail, are waters of stagnation, breeding thoughts of malaria and ague, with a consequent desire for speedy flight. We sped from them, that day, swiftly enough, along a straight, interminable turnpike, from which flat landscape expanded on either side in unrelieved monotony. Gray sign-posts, recording kilometres passed and kilometres to come, were the only landmarks for a long distance. The clouds hung low; the raindrops spattered down. We put up the top, and were protected not only from them, but also from the disheartening prospect. Not so with our vetturino. Soon, he became little better than "a dripping sop" — to quote the imperishable landlady of Dickens's unfinished romance. Luckily, he was the soul of good-nature, thriving upon adventure, which, presently, overtook him in a mild form. We had passed through several small villages, too mean and unimportant for record upon any map. Then, in a larger one called Commessaggio, we lost the way, which, hitherto, had presented no alternatives. We floundered off in fog and mire on a wrong course, all of which it was necessary to retrace. It appeared as if we never should have done with Commessaggio.

Once more in the open country, we whirled on by other villages, each of which, in turn, we mistook for our elusive destination. At last, through the misty atmosphere, we caught a glimmer of far-off domes and towers which, really, were Sabbioneta's, as the guide-posts showed. About one o'clock we drew near its high brick walls; and, crossing a bridge over the sluggish moat, we plunged through a monumental gateway along a broad, paved street, vacant, except for a few stray soldiers of the garrison dismally quartered upon this outlying post. We came to one wide, lonely square; then, to another; and, turning from that into a squalid courtyard, drew up at the inn.

It seemed to us, as we alighted, the most hopeless, uninviting place of entertainment in the world. Its ground floor was chiefly devoted to a dingy taproom, full of guzzling contadini; but the landlord and his wife were heartily glad to see us. They placed a small inner room at our disposal, and started a roaring fire of brushwood there. Our spirits rose with the temperature; we grew comfortably warm, for the first time that day. The question of food was considered so carefully as to induce confidence, by no means misplaced. They brought steaming soup, well seasoned; we had eggs, macaroni, and cheese in abundance; the wine was of excellent quality. When all was over, we called for the bill; and they footed up one absurdly, pathetically small. Thackeray, in his “ Memorials of Gormandising,” enjoins upon the traveller the keeping of a dinner-journal for future reference, therewith to revivify the purest and most precious enjoyments of which life is capable. Had we done so, that surprising repast of Sabbioneta would stand high up on the list. We need, in fact, no spur to its remembrance, which quickens at the thought, reproducing every detail of our refreshment at the Albergo del Sole, without such artificial aid. The peasants murmur behind the door, the fog drifts past the window-panes, the rain drips from the eaves, while the fire crackles on the hearth-stone, and we linger in its glow, forgetting that, thus far, this is all we know of Sabbioneta, that time is short, and that there is work to do.

We went out on foot, finding that the rain had ceased, — a happy respite, granted for the remainder of our stay. We began with Vespasian’s palace, at one end of the

Piazza Ducale, the first of the two squares through which we had driven from the gate. It is a fine Renaissance building, with an imposing entrance, where the elaborate decorations have been somewhat mutilated; but the interior, devoted now to official purposes, so far as the main features go, remains unaltered. In each corner of the high central hall stands upon its pedestal the equestrian figure of a ducal Gonzaga, carved in wood. These effigies are of natural size, well modelled, carefully colored. The four Gonzagas bear thus a startling relation to life; and they keep impressive guard over the stately apartment, which otherwise is empty. A smaller hall, leading from it to the council-chamber, has stucco-reliefs by Alberto Cavalli in the style of Primaticcio, who, under Giulio Romano's direction, designed much of the ornament in the fantastic Palazzo del Tè at Mantua. Here the work includes a portrait-frieze of the Gonzaga family, most curious and interesting. Another hall, used as a boys' school, was opened for our study of its carved chimney-piece and superb gilded ceiling. We interrupted a recitation. The teacher and his pupils, rising as we came in, stood respectfully during our visit, which, owing to this embarrassing bit of deference, we made very short.

We turned back into the streets. Everywhere they retain their original lines and are still architecturally effective, but painfully silent. Roaming on along these solemn ways, we came out into the Piazza d' Armi, where Vespasian was accustomed to hold public reviews, at one of which occurred the quarrel with his only son that resulted in the boy's death. The great, deserted parade-ground is overgrown with grass. A marble column, supporting a statue of Pallas, stands at the eastern end; across the other is the low façade of the summer-palace, approached through a noble arcade of fifty arches along the southern side of the square. Above the arches is a supplementary covered story, into which we climbed. It contains but one apartment, a narrow gallery, well lighted and richly decorated, running the whole length of the arcade. This was designed for the Duke's collection of sculpture, now dispersed, much of it having been transferred to the Civic Museum in Mantua. The empty treasure-house, sadly defaced, is all to be seen here, but that is splendid even in its ruin.

We passed on into the palace itself, which still glowed with remnants of the former splendor, — in its long series of once gorgeous rooms and galleries, where contadini now make their beds under the peeling frescoes and tarnished cornices. These heirs of Vespasian Gonzaga showed us about with momentary pride in the squandered wealth of their inheritance, that avails them little. Four low walls and a thatched roof would serve their domestic purposes much better. The summer-palace, slowly disintegrating, must be, in the best of seasons, an uncongenial abode.

In a side street stands the principal theatre, one of Vespasian's latest additions to the city, finished shortly before his death. It was built after the manner of ancient theatres by Scamozzi, the successor of Palladio. Thus it resembles the more famous one at Vicenza, of Palladian design, which Scamozzi completed, a few years earlier; but this of Sabbioneta is, really, the finer of the two. Its lines are freer and ampler than the other's. The simple decorative detail, sparingly employed, is of great beauty; and the whole interior, in good preservation, forms a well-nigh perfect example of the style. It is used to this day by strolling players, who contrive, occasionally, to collect an audience from the scanty population, reinforced by the exiled garrison. The stage, when we saw it, showed signs of a recent performance.

The most important of the churches is Santa Maria Incoronata, near the Piazza

Ducale, — a domed structure, massive as a cathedral, finely proportioned, but, externally, gaunt and bare, meagre and cold within. All its interest lies, as it were, in a nutshell, — the small side-chapel where Vespasian, with wise forethought, set up his own tomb. No one else, surely, would have provided such a monument to do honor to his bones. They are inclosed in a marble sarcophagus, surmounted by a bronze helmet. In a niche above is placed his portrait-statue, a seated figure of heroic size, in bronze. He is attired like a Roman emperor. His bearded face has an imperious expression, and his right hand is outstretched in a gesture of command. The Duke probably looks his best in this commemorative likeness; if so, he can hardly have been endowed with the fatal gift of beauty. Allegorical statues in marble occupy adjoining niches. The sculptor was Leoni, of Arezzo, who, obviously, had seen Michael Angelo's Medici tombs in the sacristy of San Lorenzo at Florence, and remembered them not unfavorably. His work, though reminiscent of the immortal Florentine, has individual dignity too, apart from its historic value.

This was our last impression of Sabbioneta. We left Vespasian to his ostentatious repose; and came out under lowering clouds that were brimful of rain, hurrying into our carriage just in time to escape it. Making off across the wilderness, we looked back at the city walls, dimly visible through a fog-wreath which soon enshrouded them. Showers played about us intermittently; the light waned; before our return-drive was half over, it went out. The last two hours of turnpike were long ones, passed in total darkness. The outward drive had been dreary, but this was drearier still. We reached the Golden Eagle at Mantua, not only depressed, but chilled, also, to the bone. It seemed almost needful to seek some late counterpart of Romeo's apothecary for an exhilarating restorative; but the inn-keeper had lighted our lamp; had kindled a fire, too, in the pillar of cement that he called our stove. We clung to that till warmth returned. Dinner cheered us. We had triumphed over the elements, had marked down Yriarte's quarry, and had seen Sabbioneta for ourselves. Discomfort dropped to its properly insignificant secondary place. In the foreground of our recollection rose, transfigured, only the happier things.

Life on a
Tuscan Farm

Life on a Tuscan Farm

The farm lies in the heart of the wine-growing district known as the Monti del Chianti, lying between Florence and Siena,—a tract of wild and beautiful country some thirty miles long and almost as wide. There are no railways through it, and it remains practically unknown to the traveller, for there are no towns of importance, no sights to turn him that way. The artistic treasures of San Gimignano, Volterra, Monte Oliveto, etc., lie to the south and west of the Siena line, whose slow accommodation trains are a constant source of profanity to all who travel by it. The Chianti wine has long been famous, and it all comes from this district, which is a succession of large estates, intersected by good carriage-roads, its southern slopes devoted to the grape and olive, the northern ones covered with a growth of chestnut, oak, and pine, amid dense thickets of underbrush, heather, and broom.

To reach the farm, we took a carriage at Siena and drove north for two hours, plunging first into the valley below the walls of the hill-city, through the scattered villages of the outskirts, and then steadily ascending by the post-road that winds up to Vagliagli, a little town perched upon a rocky height in the midst of the farming country. Vineyards and olive orchards soon surrounded us, and for some time the only houses to be seen were the rough stone dwellings of the contadini standing far apart upon the hillsides. Where the plantations border the road, they are dotted here and there with small signs bearing the name of the owner or of his estate, prohibiting shooting and warning off trespassers. Occasionally, the way was overshadowed for a mile or so with thick groves of forest-trees, through which our view of the distant landscape widened at every turn; until, skirting one of the larger estates, — Scopeto, — we commanded half the horizon, and, looking back, could see the towers of Siena silhouetted against the sky. Just beyond that point a semi-circular terrace, with stone seats, jutted out over the valley, and opposite this, across the road, was an ornamental gateway, through which, at the end of a long avenue, appeared the manor-house of Scopeto, an imposing structure of stone and stucco as large as a French chateau, but in style distinctly modern. The method here employed of combining house, avenue, gate, and terraced point of view into one architectural effect is common to the whole region, but this was our first example of it.

The Scopeto property stretched off on either side for a long distance; then we passed a number of smaller places, detached houses or villas, with the outlying huts of their contadini; and at a turn of the road, across a deep ravine, had a first, far-off view of our destination, — the manor-house of Dievole. A little farther on, the town of Vagliagli came in sight, a mile away; and at this point, where the first of the Dievole sign-boards cropped up, we turned sharply to the right and entered its outer avenue, a straight and narrow way, nearly half a mile in length, along a ridge at the top of the ravine.

The avenue is distinguished by a serried rank of fine old cypress trees, which at the end break into a semi-circle around the usual terraced outlook. Thence, through a gate, the inner avenue follows a gentle downward slope to the edge of a cliff, upon which stand the house and its dependencies, — stables, storehouses, workshops, grape and olive presses, a private chapel and its campanile, grouped together in an irregular cluster, with a formidable array of roofs, walls, grates, and terraces, suggesting a mediæval fortress. Some portions of the main building, undoubtedly, date from the sixteenth century; but alterations due to successive changes of ownership have modernized it. As it now stands, it is simply a rambling country-house, admirably placed, turning its long stuccoed façade to the south and substantially built to withstand a possible earthquake, with stone staircases and long, intricate passages, where even in broad daylight it is easy to go astray.

The season was late October and, as our host told us, the vintage was just over. The grape-juice stood, already undergoing its first fermentation processes, in the huge casks of the storehouses; but two long pergolas had been left ungathered for our benefit; and we were led out under their full white clusters to the garden at the southern end of the cliff. The view down the valley was superb; and all before, behind, on either hand, as far as the eye could reach, belonged to Dievole. Briefly, it was explained that the estate is shaped like an hour-glass, into the neck of which we now looked southward; that it consisted not of one, but of twenty farms, each a separate establishment, designated by an individual name. That nearest roof on the height to the west was called La Casetta; the speck on the plain below was Valli; the southernmost point visible had been christened, ages ago, the New Farm, and still kept the name, although it had been handed down from father to son in the same family of contadini through four centuries.

According to traditional custom, which still prevails in Tuscany, each farm is let to a peasant, who is thus provided with a home, and pays his rental in half the farm product. He brings up his family there, and does his best to have a large one, keeping the boys at home, if possible, so that there are often three generations under his roof. The conduct of the whole estate is intrusted to an overseer, or *fattore*, who supervises the work, collects the rents, makes repairs, settles all claims or disputes, and, representing the owner in his absence, is a kind of animated buffer between him and the contadino. The position is one of great responsibility, most difficult to fill acceptably, full of temptation to take undue advantage on one side or the other; and out of it has sprung the familiar Tuscan proverb:

> "Fammi fattore un anno,
> Se sarò povero — mio danno!"

Or, in an English equivalent: —

> Make me fattore for a year,
> And for my pocket — never fear!

The incumbent leads a fine, out-of-door life, passing from one point to another in his tour of inspection, generally on foot, with a gun slung over his shoulders to bag any game that may start up. The present fattore of Dievole is a strong, rosy-cheeked fellow of thirty or so, active and alert, having a very intelligent look in his bright black eyes and a sufficiently good address; but the slightest allusion to him in the course of our visit brought the unflattering proverb to our host's lips with a deprecatory shrug of the shoulders.

At one end of the garden terrace was a low stone shed, open on all sides, where, upon mats woven of reeds, grapes were slowly drying in layers, exposed to light and air, but shielded from the sun. These are used to form *il governo* of the wine, as it is called, and, stirred into the fermenting juice after ten days, give body and color to the new vintage. When all processes are complete, this is laid down in barrels, and kept a year or two to get into condition. The wine which we drank daily was four years old and of fine quality, like a full-flavored Bordeaux, unfortified, with no headache in it.

Just below us an olive orchard stretched away into the ravine. The trees were full of fruit, already turned dark, approaching maturity. As soon as the vintage is over, preparations for the olive-crushing begin, and we were taken to the building devoted to this, called the *frantoio*, half-way down the hill, where the mysteries of oil-making were fully described and illustrated.

The olives, stones and all, are first crushed in a stone mill run by ox-power. The mass of pulp is then transferred in flat wicker baskets to the *torchio*, or oaken press, from which the oil oozes into a vat below. The presses at Dievole are very old, elaborately carved with the arms and devices of some early padrone. Tremendous pressure is applied through a primitive capstan arrangement, which the men work by heavy wooden levers, walking round and round on the stone floor in a track much worn by the tread of laboring generations. There are commonly two or three squeezings of the pulp, the product of the first being of the finest quality; but the process, once begun, must be carried forward continuously, lest the oil should spoil in the making. It is finally drawn off into huge earthen jars of immemorial pattern, like those in which the Forty Thieves of the Arabian tale concealed themselves for nefarious purposes. It stands thus for a week in the adjoining clearing-room, called the *chiaritoio*, after which it is ready for the market.

Oil is a precious commodity, zealously guarded at every stage of its manufacture, and even while it settles in the clearing-room, there is a watchman on duty day and night. The orchards, too, are tended with great care. At best, the trees do not bear until they are twenty years old, but, if properly treated, their life is a long one, when they escape the hail-storm or cloud-burst of the mountain slopes. The whole production of the Chianti district is practically limited to the grape and olive. For though some grain is grown at the lower levels, the soil is really unsuited to it.

On the ground-floor of Dievole a long passage runs from the principal entrance to an inner paved court inclosed by the kitchen, stables, and other offices, — a picturesque place, with an old well at one end of it, long disused. On the garden side of the passage, facing south, are the dining and reception rooms, the latter the usual rendezvous of the family when it proves too cold outside to sit upon the terrace. On the other side is the principal staircase and the kitchen, — the oldest and most interesting room in the house, vaulted, like a *salle de gardes*, with an enormous fireplace over a raised stone hearth, two feet high, on which the roasting of meat with clockwork appliances for turning the spit has a kind of ceremonial dignity. On the floor above there is a drawing-room opening into a large central hall, used as a billiard-room, in which the perplexing corridors leading, or misleading, to the sleeping apartments converge.

The daily life at Dievole is of the most simple and informal character, as befits the remote, rough country, where there is no neighborhood, and social obligations are not to be considered. Morning coffee is served in the chambers, according to continental custom; after which each member of the family follows his own bent until the eleven o'clock breakfast, when the household assembles for the first time. The padrone, in these morning hours, is busy with his correspondence or with cross-examination of his wily fattore. The guest is his own master. Breakfast is a long, substantial meal, and there is much lingering over the table afterward. Then follows, in the early afternoon, some sort of expedition: a drive in an ox-cart to the post-town; a visit to the quaintly picturesque mountain-village of Carpineto, that hamlet of sixty souls who are all domiciled on three sides of an irregular public square, which, on the fourth side, is left open to the southern sunshine; or a long tramp across country by the woodland paths through the underbrush up hill and down dale to some distant part of the estate.

In this way, under guidance of some one of the family, we visited several of the farm-houses, to which the peasants welcomed us most cordially, bringing wine to drink and inviting inspection of their establishments. Some of these have curious features. At the New Farm, before mentioned, there is, for instance, a loggia of architectural importance, with a wonderful view down the hillsides to Siena; also a living-room of patriarchal proportions, with a fine chimney-piece and the original rude *cinque cento* decorations in color upon the walls. Along one side of the room was a narrow table in carved oak, with long benches capable of seating forty persons comfortably, — interesting relics of the original furniture. Another farmhouse had beside it a wide terrace, finely paved, immaculate as a dining-table. This is the *aia*, used for the thrashing of grain.

In these excursions the signs of friendly intercourse between the padrone and his farm-hands were everywhere apparent. The tenants whose hospitality we shared seemed entirely content with their lot, light-hearted, and happy. At the farm of La Casetta we saw and photographed the entire family. As none of them had ever posed for a likeness before, the event at once became momentous. Their group was arranged and disarranged; one small boy positively refused to join it; we urged him in vain, finally eliciting the fact that he was only a distant cousin, and therefore felt the impropriety of figuring among the family, which lined up once more without him. Then suddenly, with one voice, it called a halt; the youngest member, asleep upstairs, had been forgotten.

The mother rushed off, returning in a moment with her poor, half-awakened bambino, tightly swathed in its bandages. At last, to the great satisfaction of all, the photograph was taken, and a copy of it is now a treasured possession of the household.

Our longest tramp was to a point fully two hours' walk from Dievole, called Communella, where is the private pottery of the estate, at which all the olive-jars and other earthen utensils are made. The furnace stands upon a hill in the neck of the hour-glass, and is the half-way landmark of the property, which still opened to the south indefinitely. Eastward, among the hills, could be seen the roofs of the Castello di Brolio,—the most famous of all the Chianti vineyards, from which wine is shipped to all parts of the world.

The view on all sides from Communella is a very extended one, characteristic of the country, which has a rugged, volcanic cast, suggesting some imaginative drawing of

Doré. Much of its vegetation is unfamiliar to the foreigner. There are gaunt stone-pines with spreading tops, glossy ilexes, and dark, sharp-pointed cypress trees. Amid flowering heather and broom, which straggle everywhere underfoot, grows the *corbezzolo*, a thick, evergreen shrub bearing a crimson fruit, the size of a large cherry, with a pleasant, pungent flavor, used as the barberry is in New England, for jellies and preserves. We plunged through a tangle of this wild growth to the bottom of a deep gorge, where in the dry bed of a torrent a sulphur spring bubbles and boils and smells infernally; and, diverted from the path into another thicket, we were shown an ancient *uccellatoio*, a labyrinth of dwarfed ilex trees with closely interwoven branches, under which, by means of limed twigs, small game was formerly trapped. Every feature of the landscape was so new and strange that our incursions upon it were like walks in another planet. No farming country could be more unlike our own.

At the seven o'clock dinner of Dievole we were forbidden to wear evening dress upon pain of death. The meal was a long one of many courses, and after it we sat on at table, smoking, for an hour or two, sometimes until nearly ten o'clock. Then, in the adjoining room, we had a round game of cards, or a sleight-of-hand performance by our host, who is a master in that kind; and thence, at what he called the *ora canonica*, somewhere on the hither side of eleven, we retired in good order.

On Sunday morning, at nine, the bell rang in the chapel campanile, and a priest clattered up the avenue on horseback, coming from an earlier mass in a remote village. A horde of contadini swarmed into the chapel, and we followed presently with the family, through a small door in the back of the building, opening into a private box at the left of the altar. After the service we were taken round to see the fine old altarpiece, — a Holy Family of the school of

Titian, possibly by one of his pupils; for, though unsigned, it was surely good sixteenth-century work. The jolly young priest was urged to take breakfast with us; but he would accept only a cup of black coffee, which was served for him in the reception-room, while he chatted with the family upon affairs of church and state. As mass must be celebrated fasting, he had eaten nothing that morning; but his outlook upon the world seemed none the less cheery in consequence. On the contrary, he waited awhile longer, to pose several times for his photograph with much pride and circumstance; then, finally, he mounted and rode off, urbane and merry to the last.

Except for a most unexpected afternoon call from two ladies who drove over from a distant villa on the chance of finding us, this official visit from the priest was our only contact with the world. The life at Dievole is self-dependent, secluded as that of some desert island, its resources all coming from within. It is rarely long continued. The padrone has a country-house in another part of Tuscany, where the conditions are entirely normal, with manners and customs differing in no marked degree from those of other civilized communities. To his farm he repairs at intervals, generally for a week or two at a time, often bringing a house-party with him. Or, if he desires absolute rest, Dievole is a splendid refuge. "In the other place," he says, "they know the ropes, can get at me, and fish me up. Here I am my own master, — and I am safe."

We left him there, one bright morning, to his shining solitude among his flowers. There was no cloud in the sky, and the shadow of the fattore seemed the only one on all the landscape. Since the early days of Eden, there has been no garden without a snake rustling through the grass, — except, perhaps, in Ireland.

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